



オーバーライト 3
ロンドン・インベージョン

池 田 明 季 哉

[illustration] みれあ

電撃文庫

オーバーライト3

—— ロンドン・インベージョン ——

池田明季哉

(Illustration) みれあ





ブーディシア
(プリストルのゴースト)
と呼ばれる
天才グラフィティライター。

影の中から、声が響いた。
その派手な服装は、
闇の中にも沈むことなく、
むしろ非現実的なまでに
浮かび上がっていた。

「シュガー、お前、
なんでここに！」

「シュガー、お前、
なんでここに！」

「よく聞いている
じゃないか。
それだよ。
そっでなくさや」

リョコリス
ギャング団(甘い歯)の幹部。
シュガーに絶対服従を誓う。

シュガー
ロンドンで活動する
グラフィティライター。
アイシスを倒し、
ブーディシアの兄弟子。

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***For your love, for your love
I would give the stars above
For your love, for your love
I would give you all I could***

—— The Yardbirds “For Your Love”

Overwrite3
London Invasion

Prologue: “Please Please Me”

Ah, Yoshi? You doing okay? You must have been lonely after Nelina left, right? But it's okay, you can now listen to her voice to cheer you up, okay? Nelina will supply you with lots of Nelina with her voice. Ah. Aaaaah. How's that? If you want more, I'll give you more. You should ask for some more specific lines, Yoshi. Nelina'll say whatever you want. You don't need it? Geez, you're so boring. You'll only regret not asking for anything when you're agonizing in your own bed.

Why Nelina contacted you? It's because she was lonely, too! Can't you at least phone in once in a while? Nelina doesn't like how you're just keeping quiet on your front. That's not good, you know? And if you properly did that, this whole year abroad wouldn't have been—

—Well, that's not why Nelina called today. Yoshi, you have to come back to Japan. Huh? Why? Seriously, why does Nelina have to look at you from one to ten? You're such a spoiled child. A long, long time ago, there was a guitarist who ran away from his band that was so close to snacking a debut. The lonely vocalist then went out of her way to fly after the guitarist to meet him. And then, she found the guitarist getting along a bit too well with a certain stray cat! At first, the vocalist couldn't stand it at all, but eventually decided to support you too, so after a lot of back and forth, she went back to Japan to negotiate with the label and stretch out the recording.

But, that has reached its limit now. We finished signing all the contracts, so we have to get to recording and filming the music video. Even the super kind and understanding vocalist is slowly reaching her limits, okay? The tickets Nelina bought, so it's time to come home. This time, you have no right to decline, got it?

*

Nelina suddenly called to give me that lecture in July. It's almost

been a year since I came to Bristol. The new year in England begins around September, but my university classes were done in June. I managed to survive through all my harsh assignments and exams, finally allowed to breathe in relief. I haven't gotten my grades back, but from my feeling and other results, it's safe to assume I nailed my year overseas.

That being said, my visa still lasted until December, and since the new school year in Japan begins in April, I decided to stay in Bristol for a while. In fact, I could return to Japan whenever I wanted, so it wasn't a huge issue to keep being in Bristol. But then, Nelina's phone call completely threw me off-concept. And the second she was done stating her business, she hung up on me. When she speaks with her charming voice, you rarely get a chance to disagree or interrupt her. Then again, I have no more leeway to disagree, to begin with.

The reason I started my year abroad was that Nelina said my music has no soul. However, this was just a row of misunderstandings lined up, and yet, I'm still staying in Bristol. Her methods are still as forceful as always, but what she's saying is correct. In fact, I'm just causing more trouble for her. Nelina made it sound like a fairy tale, but my story is different:

I played the guitar. In Tokyo, I met a genius vocalist, who allowed me to play the guitar next to her, and as I ended up in a slump, I ran away overseas under the pretense of a year abroad. And that's when...I met her—The Ghost of Bristol. The Hurting Genius. The Golden Lion...Or, maybe even a stray cat. Being stabbed by a knife in the art museum, running through a sea of flames...We survived these adventures together. And after not being able to write graffiti for the longest time, she finally began to face it again. At the same time, I was able to play music again. What happens from now on...is something written in the stars, but the way I see it...

Through the power of graffiti, I found my motivation for music, so the guitarist will return to Japan, and continue working in the band while causing more trouble for the vocalist. He'll stick with the vocalist who would easily blow up all on her own, and with a stroke of luck or maybe even hard work, he might be blessed and find popularity. The events in Bristol were unexpected, but they were just a brief change of actions, nothing more. It's like you're doing a side

quest in a game to get that special item. The general scenario does not change. And ten years into the future, I will look back on this time and think “Oh yeah, that happened.”

When that happens, will everyone be happy? What will my life be like? I'll probably look at a picture of the girl's graffiti. Sometimes, you encounter something abrupt that completely changes how what you believe in and how you look at things. But this new scenery won't ever be the same. No matter how you wish for it, the next wall comes, and your fate will be overwritten. That's why I have no reason to not return home to Japan.

...Except one: The fact that there lives a Ghost who has possessed my heart and won't let me leave.

Advertisement

Chapter 1: “A Summer Song”

The “Everyone” Bristol Movie Theater was close to the Clifton Down Station of the Great Western Railway. However, as trains leaving Bristol usually went long-distance, it was mostly faster to just walk there yourself, especially if you live in the center. Moving from the block that went around in a triangular shape, you go north to Queens Road, entering Whiteladies Road. Looking at the large trees growing at the sides of the street really created a summer sensation. Passing an old building erected in the 19th century that contained a TV studio, as well as an expensive supermarket, you reached the movie theater in question. It was a stone building that clearly had lived through many years, which had a sign on it that said “Whiteladies Picture House.” The sign was made of black color with white letters written on it. It couldn’t look more than a movie theater even if you tried.

But I have to say, it’s been a long time since I went to a movie theater. Generally, I like movies quite a bit, but there were so many things going on that the very thought of checking out the movie theater didn’t even pop up in my mind. Not to mention, there are a lot of methods nowadays to allow you to watch movies. I don’t have to spend time at the movie theater if I can watch everything on my smartphone, and probably for cheaper, too. However, today was a day when I was willing to invest more money and time.

“You’re here early, Boo-san.”

I spotted her standing in front of the movie theater, smoking on her vape. I checked the time and there was still a lot of extra time until the movie would start.

“Hmph, and you’re *fashionably late*. When were you such an arrogant brat? Did you get into the Hall of Fame of rock?”

“Right back at you, Boo-san. As a graffiti writer, you seem to have a

lot of time on your hands.”

“Oh zip it. I have *free roam* on everything.”

The LED in her hand lit up, as she grumbled while blowing out some white smoke. The scent of vanilla that came from that accurately contradicted her sour expression, as it was very sweet. When we first met, I didn’t really know how to handle this brusque attitude, but now I felt relief. And despite the attitude she showed me, she was actually the person who invited me to watch a movie together. Unless it was related to graffiti, she’d rarely even step out. But lately, she’d regularly invite me somewhere. I wonder how many times this makes it, now.

Studying for my university exams, playing the guitar, working at the 8-Bit world, then tagging along when she wrote graffiti, and sometimes going out like this. Rinse and repeat. In all honesty, a part of me wished these days could continue forever. And that’s why I’ve decided to stay in Bristol—Because I wanted to spend time with the Ghost.

“Let’s just go,” Boudicia said and entered the hefty front door.

“Wow...”

The sight opening up in front of me led me to groan in surprise. The lobby of the movie theater looked like a high-class bar. Since most movie theaters I had seen so far were located in Japan’s shopping malls, this felt like I came overseas. Here, the inside was colored in a peaceful dark-brown color, creating an old-school and welcoming feeling. The shelves were probably filled with objects from the cinema, acting as a display. And the rug on the floor gently welcomed our feet inside. The counter Boudicia confidently walked toward also looked like a bar, and she told the blonde and long-haired employee our movie, as well as checked the seats. Seeing that, I was a bit bewildered.

“Boo-san, you like movies?”

“Mm, not really. *Staying still* ain’t my thing.”

“You sure about this, then? The movie will last an hour and 46 minutes.”

“But you’ll do something if I get tired of it, right?”

“No, nothing at all.”

“Huh? Why do you think I dragged you here?”

“I’m not a *cat toy*. If you properly watch the movie, you won’t get tired of it.”

“That’s not the problem here. I just can’t sit still.” Boudicia kept on grumbling as she accepted the tickets, heading for the second screening room.

She then opened the heavy double wooden door, which revealed the *theater* hidden behind it. The room was colored in a pleasant wine-red color, with the seats being low, and not much of a slope. I guess you could call it art decoration, but there were gorgeous golden decorations hanging everywhere. The ceiling especially stood out from that, as a crest stood out in the center, looking like an angel that illuminated the room. Completely contradicting what I was used to in Japan, this luxurious but equally relaxing feeling made it seem like we were going to watch a stage play rather than a movie.

“I’ve never seen a movie theater like this in Japan.”

“I’m not too knowledgeable about it either, but this was an old theater that they rebuilt for this purpose, I think.”

Oh yeah, it did say “Whiteladies Picture House” on the outside. I was so used to seeing movie cinemas being called theaters that I forgot this was the former and original term for those. Another thing I learned after coming here. Boudicia walked down the short stairs, heading to the seats in the center of the cinema. And then, she sat down on a sofa clearly thought out to be used by two people. I looked around in shock, seeing that the entire room was filled with these sofas. Some seats offered space for only one person, but the majority was the sofa. It even had a small table attached to it to place your belongings on. All this looked so ridiculously luxurious, I

couldn't help but laugh at the fact that the price wasn't much different from what I was used to in Japan.

"Barely anybody's here, though..."

"It's a *weekday noon*, what'd you expect?" She said with a self-explanatory tone.

To me, these empty seats and nobody in sight felt like we had entered a different world.

"Hurry up and sit down."

"Y-Yes," I lowered my hip as I was told.

The soft sofa had already given in to her weight as I sunk even deeper while feeling its softness. Since we got here fairly early, we just talked about whatever came to our minds. Boudicia mentioned that Aeon bought some weird spray paint. As well as that Lara recently worked on a new graffiti. That the taste of Peni's burritos tasted a bit different lately. That JF scored himself an event as DJ. And how Gabriel was working on a new song. However, our topics always moved around what we should be discussing, not reaching the crucial nucleus. But soon after, the lights in the movie theater dropped.

I leaned against the back of the sofa, wiping my glasses when the advertisements started playing. What really stuck out to me was the advertisement for diamonds, depicting a man and woman who went to buy engagement rings, got married, and then spent the rest of their lives together. Finally, the mother gave the engagement ring to their child, which created the phrase "Timeless Beauty."

I glanced over at Boudicia. She had her eyebrows narrowed, clearly in a bad mood. She's probably waiting for the advertisements to stop. And at the same time, I was feeling restless. Understandably so, as I didn't expect things to end up like this. The big and spacey cinema, stacked with sofas, felt like it belonged to only me and her. And yet, my feelings were completely ignored, as time passed and the lights vanished completely. Finally, the movie began.

The setting of the movie was an island in Dublin. A young man was forced to transfer schools as his father lost his job, where he meets a girl who aspires to become a model. In order to cheer up the girl, they decide to form a band and play music. I thought it was a heartwarming movie. The way they created a completely new song really touched me personally, and the actors, probably not too famous just yet, all did a great part in their roles. Of course, as a band of students, they weren't particularly cool or talented. In reality, it was a bit painful to watch at times. But even so, I found myself attached to the story.

Then, there was a news segment inside the movie, stating that in recent years, younger people have been attracted by London and the ray of hope. As a result of that, the young boy and girl also dreamed of going to London one day. To find something they can't find where they live. And to me, this was something very familiar. Painfully so, even.

As the movie reached its midpoint, the closer boy and girl got, the more restless Boudicia seemed. At first, she sat next to me just fine, but she eventually began sliding down the sofa, tilting her head, or shaking her knees. I knew she would struggle to sit still eventually, but it happened faster than that. Nor did I think it would be this bad. Back in the shop, she could sit still for several hours, but I'm guessing the pressure of having to sit still now only amplified her desire, I bet. Maybe she would have been able to control herself if the cinema was packed with people, but as it was now, she probably just let it slide.

Meanwhile, the boy and girl happened to get into a fight. The girl planned to head to London for her modeling career, only to realize that she had been deceived, left with no other choice but to return to Dublin. The anger and frustration built up from this were then directed at the boy. He, in return, left the girl behind. Finally, his first live concert at a school dance party arrived. It was so clumsy that it made you laugh, but the passion he showed allowed the party to flourish. But on the inside...the boy was worried if the girl would come to the live concert, as they had split once. And while watching the movie, I wondered to myself just where the two would be heading.

Will they spend their day living apart in Dublin as if nothing

happened...or will they go to London together? I wanted to see that choice being made. After all...it was the same choice that was given to me at this very moment. And right as the live concert came to an end, I suddenly felt an impact hit my body. But I didn't have to look around much to realize where it came from. After all—Boudicia had placed her head on my lap. And because I never would have expected something like this, I felt my heart racing painfully fast. In fact, I was this close to jumping up from the sofa in shock.

And because she practically slammed her head on my lap, her cap had fallen off, and her blonde hair spread all over my legs. And even as she laid down sideways, her blue eyes reflected the bright screen ahead of us. She really is a free soul, all right. Only doing the things she wants to do. Laying down if she wants to lay down. And I came all this way because I admire her for that. The reason I didn't tell her to get up is that I didn't want to get in the way of her freedom, too—No, that was just an excuse.

In Boudicia's story, I'm probably just a temporary side character. I happened to be there at the right time to act as a comfortable cushion, nothing more. I can't wish for anything more than that. All I can do is leave the movie when it's time for me to go—Or, so it should be. I gently caressed her head, as her blonde hair ran between my fingers. She kept her head directed at the screen, so I couldn't tell what expression she had, but she didn't try to resist at all. And while indulging in this warmth, I truly wished that this movie would never end. I wanted to stay inside this cinema, sitting next to her on this sofa, until we turned to bones—and eventually, to dust. But, time is always cruel and merciless. There is no story that never comes to an end.



Even as the credits rolled, Boudicia didn't move. It took me until the lights turned on to realize that she had fallen asleep, gently breathing as she kept her head on my lap the entire time.

*

"Boo-san, the movie ended."

“Mmmm...”

She raised both her hands to stretch in pleasure, letting out a yawn. That gesture once again reminded me of a cat.

“That was a great movie, right? And the music was so touching, too.”

The reason I suddenly spoke of my impressions of the movie was that I felt awkward. I thought she let me caress her hair, but maybe she didn’t even realize. If so, then what I did was just a selfish act that used the convenience of her being asleep for my own benefit.

“*Comfortable.*”

“You’re just talking about your nap, right?”

“Nope, I was talking about your *lap*.”

“That’s even worse,” I grabbed her cap and handed it to her, which she put back on her head with both her hands.

“So...what happened to those two in the end? Did they go to London?”

“Why do I have to explain the final scene of a movie to the person I watched it with?”

“Geez, stop being so hung up on that. If it feels good, everybody will fall asleep.”

How long was she awake, then? Also, who would fall asleep while watching a movie after inviting someone to join them?

“How much of the movie did you see?”

“I think up to the party they got into a fight.”

“What about the live concert?”

“Err...maybe?”

If that’s the case, then she has missed all the crucial parts. Namely, what happened to the two, and what choice they took in the end.

“Then I’ll keep that a secret.”

“Huh? C’mon, I’m curious. Tell me!” She grabbed my shoulders and shook my body.

“It’s your fault for falling asleep mid-way through the movie.”

Thanks to that, I almost completely forgot to even watch the movie. I could still feel her weight on my lap.

“You’re so *mean* today, Yoshi.”

“In fact, I think I deserve to be called *kind* because I’m not getting angry despite being used as a pillow.”

“Then you can use me as a pillow next, mkay?”

“Although that sounds enticing, I’m actually the type to properly watch the movie.”

On the inside, I was utterly flustered, but I tried to remain as calm as possible. I didn’t even have to think much when engaging in a conversation with her. Now that my English skill had risen drastically, I was slowly matching her rhythm. As we left the movie theater, the bright sun blinded my eyes. Here in Bristol, the season during July was the most pleasant to live through. Granted, Bristol was located in the south of the UK, but still higher than Hokkaido. It doesn’t get too cold in the winter, but the summer also wasn’t oppressively hot. With a lot of green scenery in the town, it was different from the burning asphalt in Japan. The sunlight was more pleasant than destructive, making the air we breathed in fresh. Unlike in Japan, the rain didn’t last for an entire season, just enough to cool down the air at times.

After the movie, we decided to buy graffiti spray for Boudicia, so we stopped by Aeon’s shop. And while we walked down the stone-paved path, I thought about the movie one more time, as well as the reason why I didn’t tell Boudicia about the final scene. Put simply, I was worried. About the fact that we were together right at this very moment. And the end of our relationship was slowly approaching. Just like the movie was slowly but surely making its way toward the

credits.

However, I genuinely don't know how Boudicia feels about that. It really felt like I spent my time with a stray cat. That she could vanish the very next moment I didn't look at her. So to ensure she was still there, I looked over at her. With each step she took, her hair swayed left and right, making my lips feel heavy as lead, leaving me unable to say another word. My heart was strangled by an unknown force that made it hard for me to breathe.

What if she doesn't feel anything about me going back to Japan? Just seeing me off with a "Right, take care"...? I'm sure it would hurt me a lot. I'm just contradicting myself. One part of me wishes to leave quickly so that I don't constantly weigh down on her like a fly, and yet I also find myself terrified if she really would be just fine without me by her side.

"Tsk, who the hell put some lame-ass graffiti like this here?"

My thoughts and hesitation were interrupted by Boudicia clicking her tongue. She glared at a wall we passed and crossed her arms. Just as she stated, I could see a rough drawing with a tag attached to it. And I didn't remember this being here, either. She put down her backpack and took out a spray can, shaking it with her left hand. I heard the familiar sound of the paint inside being rattled.

Despite it being barely noon, rarely anybody would pass through here. And since there was already existing graffiti in a place like this, nobody should complain if she's going to overwrite it. If this was Japan, someone would probably come jumping out the second they saw graffiti being written. Comparatively, Bristol was rather open-minded to it. And surely, it's because the graffiti writers here continue to make this culture flourish.

"How is your left hand doing?"

I traced her movement while she moved the spray can along the wall as that question popped up in my mind. She didn't stop her hand and answered while looking at the wall.

"Well, I can write just fine. Granted, the fine movement's impossible

at this point. Especially when it comes to using my wrist. But the bigger stuff works just fine. My flow's gotten better, too."

"Flow..."

"Like the current that I write the letters in...Something like that? I can't really describe it." She tilted her head at her own words and then continued to look at the wall.

I know that the scar on her right arm will never disappear. And that she won't ever be able to move it the same way as before. She wondered if she should continue to write using her left hand, but since that Christmas day, she lost all hesitation. Since then, she's been regularly writing graffiti. Talk of the Ghost of Bristol having returned spread across town, and she found her passion again, even if she could not continue the same way as before.

"But, it sure is weird."

"What is?"

The sound of spray stopped, as Boudicia lowered her left hand.

"Sure, I can move my hand, and I can write what's coming up in my mind. But, that's all..."

"What do you mean by that?"

I've watched her write graffiti this entire time. And all her effort definitely couldn't be categorized as "That's all." I did see how she vented her anger because of her arm not moving properly, and when she was depressed about it. Boudicia grabbed another spray can from her bag and moved her hand again.

"I mean, a lot of stuff happened. I gave up on victory or defeat, just writing stuff...But in the end, I keep wondering what I even want to write." She grabbed a different spray can and added her small ghost sign next to the finished graffiti.

The graffiti she had just finished was, to put in simple terms, breathtaking. And now, I knew that this was called a wild style. You would freely write the letters line from the line, only to connect at

the very end. They spread in all different directions, covering the whole wall. The colors of blue, orange, and yellow almost created an imbalance, and yet came together in unison by the end. And yet, Boudicia didn't seem too excited as she looked down at her own hands.

"Just where...am I supposed to go?"

Normally, I would have tried to cheer her up. But with that graffiti in front of me, I found myself unable to do so. As someone who was touched by her work, I couldn't shake this faint feeling of discomfort. And this was so minuscule, anybody else might have missed out on it. Namely...this graffiti lacked passion. The kind of heat you feel when one's life is being burned away when your soul is ablaze...I don't feel it from the graffiti in front of me. And since I realized this, there's no way that Boudicia doesn't know. That's why I couldn't just blindly attempt to cheer her up.

"Oh, Yoshi and Boudicia."

As I hesitated about what I should even say, a familiar deep voice reached my ears. When looking over at the source of this voice, I spotted a tall and muscular man with chocolate skin.

"Aeon? What are you doing here?" Boudicia acted like nothing happened, as she called out to him.

"I'm on my way home from a brief shopping trip." He tossed the apple in his hand into the sky and caught it again.

In his left hand, I could see crisps and sandwiches hanging down. He must probably be out buying his lunch.

"Hmm..."

Through his sunglasses, Aeon glanced at Boudicia's newly finished graffiti. He seemed to be lost about it, too. I personally wanted my assumption to just be my imagination, as I watched his face in anxiety.

"What? If you have something to say, then go out with it."

Unable to bear the silence, Boudicia grumbled in anger. I figured Aeon would give her a piece of his mind with some strict advice, but to my surprise—

“Boudicia. You are *gifted*. That’s what I think,” Aeon praised Boudicia. “Some people can just pull off whatever they attempt. Even though you lost your hand, you managed to continue writing with your left. Many people would have struggled with that. Even to the point, it would take them a lifetime to reach where you stand. And I truly admire your talent and strength for that. *But*.”

“*But...what?*”

“Being *able to do* something and asking *what to do* are two different questions.”

Boudicia tried to comment on that, but could only blink at Aeon with an open mouth. He saw this and handed his belongings to me.

“Hold this for a moment.”

“Ah, sure.”

Aeon held the apple in his one hand, as he bent over to grab a black spray can from Boudicia’s bag. He shook it a bit and then began overwriting—the graffiti that Boudicia had just finished.

“Ah, hey?!”

Both Boudicia and I were bewildered. We both saw Aeon as someone calm and reserved, so seeing him take such a radical action threw us both for a loop. Meanwhile, he used his whole body to move the trail of spray all over the wall. His movement was soft and fluid like a river, showing no wasted energy. It’s like I was watching some ancient magic spell being cast.

“This is...”

The graffiti that was done in a mere few moments—was a dragon. No, that’s not quite right. He used the four letters AION to form a dragon with those. And yet, it looked like it was alive. The strokes wrapped around the letters like they had come alive. Even though he

only used one color of black, there was a gradient in the spray color, making it look like the dragon's scales shone, and smoke came out of its mouth.

"...Why'd you overwrite it?" Boudicia pouted as she put the backpack on her back.

When overwriting something, you have to either make something that's more difficult or looks better than the previous one. In terms of this unwritten law, Aeon clearly showed an act of aggressive rebellion. What Boudicia wrote was an excessive masterpiece. In return, Aeon's work was something resembling a tag. And even so... the overwhelming pressure and vigor from the graffiti he wrote gratified the overwrite. What resided inside this graffiti—was something akin to a soul. And Boudicia clearly understood that more than anybody else, because she packed her graffiti away.

"I'm an *ordinary man*. And I am jealous of you. So now, I'm venting out my frustration at a genius who's stuck in a slump."

Aeon stuffed the spray can he held into Boudicia's bag, as he accepted the things I held for him. Since he still smiled, I could not tell how serious he was about that.

"*That's unlike you.*" Boudicia said.

"*I am not like what you think.*"

"*Whatever.*"

"More importantly. Yoshi, when are you going back to Japan?"

"Huh?"

Aeon's words took me by surprise, as I raised my voice in shock. Needless to say, I haven't told either Aeon or Nelina, so how Boudicia found out was a mystery to me. And as I panicked, Aeon gave me a dubious look.

"Since your year has ended, I figured you'd be going back home soon."

“Ah, well, yes, about that...”

I glanced over at Boudicia, but she was just staring at Aeon’s graffiti, her back turned toward us. But, I’m sure she must have heard that question.

“During this month, I think.”

Having no reason to lie, I just gave a serious response.

“I see. I’ll come to see you off, then.”

“Thank you.”

“But make sure to not have any regrets or anything left undone.”

“Rather than that, I don’t even feel like I did much here.”

“That’s what being alive is all about, actually.” Aeon smiled, allowing me to see something bigger inside this picture.

If there was something left for me to do...Then I’d like to see Boudicia writing graffiti that truly satisfies her. But then, I remembered the photo I have of graffiti she had written lately. Lately, we’ve almost always been together when she was writing, but that one I missed out on that. It had a similar atmosphere to her earlier works, and it was a complete shock that she could even pull that off with her left hand.

“Boo-san, I actually really like this graffiti of yours.”

“Let me see.”

I gave the smartphone to her. I expected a reaction along the lines of “Oh, that? Well, it does look pretty good,” but her response completely took me by surprise. She stared at the phone screen in distraught, completely frozen.

“Where did you...”

“I found this near Bristol’s Temple Meads station.”

Then, a long silence followed.

“But...this isn’t mine.”

“What? No, that can’t be...”

Sure enough, I’m not a writer. However, I’ve watched her graffiti for almost a year now, so I wouldn’t mistake this for...I mean, could there be a writer in Bristol who has the same style as her? Before I realized it, Aeon had joined us, staring down at my smartphone.

“Boudicia, *are you thinking what I’m thinking?*”

“Yeah. *Which I didn’t want to*, though.”

The two looked at each other, as a tense atmosphere filled the air.

“Let me be straight. I didn’t hear a damn thing about this.”

“Same here. Also, he should be in London, right?”

“But I heard similar reports near here...”

“Then...why now...”

“Excuse me...But what’s going on?”

When I threw in a question, the sunglasses and blue eyes moved over toward me in unison. They then looked at each other, only to move to me again.

“My bad. This graffiti was done by...*someone I know.*”

“*Someone...?*”

“Yeah. He should be in London right now...But if that’s here, then he’s definitely in Bristol.”

I looked at the picture again. Now that she mentioned it, it didn’t seem entirely identical, but the way the letters connected and the creation of shadows did resemble Boudicia’s style.

“It does resemble your graffiti, though?”

“No, it does not!”

“But...”

“I’m saying it doesn’t!”

I was taken aback by the sheer pressure from her voice. There’s no way there couldn’t be any relation between these two, looking at how similar they are. Or, that’s the conclusion I reached, at the very least. And, I knew I couldn’t cross this line Boudicia showed...However, my emotions wouldn’t allow me to stay rational.

“Who is it?”

“*None of your business!*”

“*Yes, it is!*”

“*Why?!*”

“*Because your business is mine, too!*”

Before we could continue to argue, Aeon broke between us.

“Boudicia, Yoshi. *Calm down. Breathe.*”

I did as I was told and took a deep breath. The blood vessels inside of me started to cool down, as my blood circulated more peacefully. At the same time, Boudicia looked like she was about to breathe fire.

“Yoshi. I know the person who wrote that graffiti.” Aeon crossed his arms as he glanced at Boudicia, who had turned her back toward us. “[He] once wrote graffiti together with me and Boudicia. And he called me ‘Sensei,’ except I didn’t teach him anything.

Sensei...The sudden use of Japanese vocabulary took me by surprise. Granted, it’s a term that is fairly well-known even outside Japan, but it must have been influenced by Aeon’s interest in Japanese culture. Aeon may have denied it, but I can feel a deep relationship between the two.

“Basically...to Boudicia, [he] would be...How do you call it, a

Senpai?”

And Aeon’s next statement sent my chest into disarray. Boudicia’s... Senpai?

“The heck is that?” Boudicia turned around and asked, so I explained.

“Well, it’s the closest English word to a *senior*. It’s a *mate* who walked the same path as you, just a bit longer, so they have more experience.”

“...That’s not it.” She said and turned her back toward me again, staring at Aeon’s graffiti. “*He is no mate*. He just left Bristol without saying a word, running away to London. Leaving me behind, no less. And when I lost my arm, he was nowhere to help me...”

She said that she was alone for most of the latter half of the year. And listening to her gloomy voice, I could tell. I’ve watched her from so close, I can tell. How much trust she had put into that Senpai person. Not too long ago, she had slept on my lap. However, that blonde hair that I felt at that time was now completely out of my reach. There’s no way one person could learn everything there is in just one life. Even so, finding out about a part of her that I didn’t know existed...made my chest feel tight. Maybe Aeon realized, as he quietly muttered.

“Yoshi, Boudicia...I told you before, right? Life is like a spray that never stops. And for that reason, I always say to *not leave anything behind*. I have faith in you,” Aeon threw the apple he held to Boudicia, who awkwardly caught it with her left hand.

“Not leave anything behind...huh?” She snorted. “You make it sound so easy,” Boudicia grumbled and bit into the red apple in her hand.

*

On the way to the art supply shop, Boudicia and Aeon didn’t speak a single word. This continued even inside, as Boudicia just went through the shelves of spray cans.

“All right, I’ll take the 94 sulfur yellow and mango, as well as the Madrid red. I’ll probably need an Astro fat cap, too...But they sell

those in packs of ten, right? I really don't need that many."

"Then you'll get it on the house along with your regular purchase. One is fine, right?"

"Yeah, sorry about that."

"*No worries*. I wanna be *loyal* to a *loyal customer*, after all." Aeon thanked Boudicia with a joke and showed his white teeth.

Meanwhile, Boudicia walked through the shelves without hesitation, grabbing the spray cans in question and placing them on the counter. She then took the crunchy pound bills and some coins out of her pocket and placed them, intending to head out of the store once the payment was done. But at the same moment, two people entered. They immediately stood out to me because they didn't dress like regular citizens.

One of them was smaller than me, wearing a hoodie with faint pastel colors and gradation...looking like plastic wrapping on candy. Additionally, the silver bob-cut hair felt a bit otherworldly. Their eyelashes had the same color, drawing a shadow on their white face because of their length. They had a somewhat childish expression, looking innocent and heartwarming. I could even see the hints of a unicorn from its overall appearance.

The other individual was quite tall, wearing nothing but black. They wore a typical biker jacket, with fitting black and wavy hair that ran down their shoulders. Their height even rivaled Aeon, and paired with their black attire, they emitted massive pressure. On their long legs, they wore jet-black boots. And their sharp gaze reminded me of a raven eyeing its prey.

Rainbow colors and black. They were the exact opposite, and yet they were an oddly eerie fit. Seeing those two, Boudicia screamed.

"You...Sugar!"

"*Hi! It's been a while*, Boo-chan. As well as Aeon-sensei."

The color one showed an open and accepting smile as they raised a hand. They possessed a shrill voice, resembling a trumpet.

“Yeah...It’s been *ages*.” Aeon muttered as he stepped away from the counter, moving to stand in front of Boudicia and me.

“And this here is Liquorice-chan. She’s a *friend* of mine!”

“Hallo. I’m Liquorice.”

The person in question threw us a blunt self-introduction without even showing any kind of emotion, just looking around with a sharp gaze. No doubt, something was off here. The man called Sugar was clearly relaxed and seemed happy that he got to meet a friend of his. Yet, Boudicia, Aeon, and Liquorice all seemed on edge, worried that something might go south.

“What did you come here for?” Aeon asked as I could see his muscles tensed up.

“Oh geez, Sensei. Your precious *apprentice* came to greet their *master*. Even from all the way in London. I figured you’d be a bit happier. Isn’t that right, Liquorice-chan?”

“Yes, *absolutely*.” Liquorice remained her lack of expression, answering with a deep voice.

“But man, this takes me back. *This place never changes*. It’s still the same as back then.”

Sugar looked around and admired the stacked shelves. He grabbed one spray can and gazed at it.

“That’s Sensei, all right. You really get it. I came here to write graffiti, of course. All the other cities around are full to the brim already, so it’s time to get that *cherry on top*.” Sugar smiled happily, opening both his arms.

Immediately after, I could feel sparks fill the air. Both Aeon and Boudicia glared at Sugar in silence.

“Sugar-san, I’d be happy if you didn’t forget about us, either.”

“Of course. I don’t give a damn about your gang’s turf or whatever... But, our interests do align.”

The turf of a gang...Graffiti...how are they connected? Many things were shrouded in mystery, but there is one thing that was painfully clear. This was a declaration of war from London against Bristol. But before I could think about it any further, Sugar looked at me.

“Oh, that’s an *unfamiliar* face. Who are you?”

“Huh? Oh, I am...”

“He’s just a *passerby*.”

Before I could answer, Boudicia responded to the question. But honestly, I didn’t feel anger or anything. Clearly, the people we were dealing with are dangerous. They seemed open and friendly at first glance, but once their mouths open, you could feel the hostility.

“Hmm...Oh, well. I’m Sugar, and I’m Boo-chan’s *best friend*. Nice to meet you.”

“I never once saw you as a friend!”

“That’s a bit harsh, don’t you think? Before, you’d always look at me with such glitter in your eyes.”

“How long ago was that...Also, I never did that!”

Sugar had a distant look in his eyes, almost like he went through an album in his mind.

“I haven’t forgotten...All those times we wrote together...and what Aeon-sensei said.”

“Sugar, I...”

“See how much I’ve grown? I want you to be *proud* of me.”

Aeon seemed somewhat hesitant to continue, as Boudicia looked up at him. Yet, Sugar didn’t mind the two and just raised his index finger.

“Life is like a never-ending spray, right? You’ve all forgotten about that. You and I...we all die eventually. We’re all too relaxed about

this. And that's why the graffiti in this town is not good enough. It's like tasteless and bland cotton candy. Nobody here is living properly. That's not good enough...So, we should just destroy it all once."

"As expected of Sugar-san. Out of all the gangs in London, you are a *true* artist." Liquorice smiled as she clapped her hands together.

I couldn't read her emotions in the slightest, even now.

"Thank you, Liquorice-chan. Ah, could you give me *that*?"

"Of course," Liquorice responded and stuffed her hands into her black jacket, only to take out a purple plate of sorts.

Taking off the wrapping, from the inside appeared chocolate that was cut into a rectangular shape.

"Mhm, good. Sweet is always good. It feels like you're alive. And if you ask me, the dairy milk chocolate from Chadbury is the best in the whole world. Because it's not just the scent of cacao that stands out. It's packed to the brim with sugar to the point it could give you a sweet tooth. And then you need a mountain of milk, otherwise, you can't even call it chocolate. Isn't that right, Liquorice-chan?"

"*Absolutely*, Sugar-san."

Despite the one-sided oppressive discussion, Liquorice showed a polite and upright response.

"And since I feel quite good today, I will give you a reward." Sugar grabbed the chocolate from Liquorice's hand, offering it to her in front of her face. "Eat it."

Liquorice did as she was told, biting down on the chocolate. However, right as that entered her mouth, Sugar swung his fist and slammed it right into her face. The chocolate must have gotten stuck in her throat, as she fell to the ground on all fours and started coughing. And Sugar wasn't done, as he kicked his leg right into her stomach. Again and again, his sneakers rammed into her abdomen. She continued to cough violently, as the chocolate scattered on the ground.

I aggressively struggled to even comprehend what was going on. I've witnessed countless ridiculous situations since I came to Bristol. All of them are unbelievable back in Japan. Be it police, graffiti writers, or musicians, I've seen a lot, but none of those situations had me on edge as much as what unfolded in front of me. Maybe this was genuine hostility and killing intent. And yet, Sugar hurt Liquorice like he just went on a walk. This person...is twisted.

He doesn't feel anything about hurting other people. In that way, Liquorice was just as weird. Looking at her clothes and attitude right now, she was definitely used to violence. If she really wished for it, she could easily crush Sugar. And yet, nothing is happening. It's almost like she wished for this.

"What is..." Aeon stopped this sight with a deep voice.

"Hm? But Liquorice-chan likes this. Right?"

"Yes..."

"Yup, I knew it. So, what are you supposed to say?"

"Thank you...very much..."

"That's right. Pain reminds people that they are alive. And people who are on the verge of death are beautiful. You are beautiful, Liquorice-chan."

I felt someone pull on my clothes when I saw Boudicia hold onto me, looking away. Her hand was faintly shaking. But, I wasn't doing much better. I could feel my stomach turning, as I suppressed the urge to vomit. The only one different—was Aeon.

"Stop this."

When I heard that, he had already moved. He grabbed Sugar's narrow arm, raising him up like he was fooling around with a toy.

"Oopsies." Sugar almost tipped over several times, moving away from Liquorice.

"This is not what I taught you."

Rather than a teacher discussing with his student, Aeon looked like a parent scolding their child. And yet, Sugar didn't seem bothered by this in the slightest. He just grinned with an eerie smile.

"Nope, you definitely taught me. And I still remember it. That's why I came to Bristol..." Right as Sugar cut off his own words— "*Everything comes to naught.*"

I didn't fully understand what even happened. I just saw Aeon collapse to the ground, as a red liquid came gushing out of his solar plexus, spreading on the ground.

"Huh?"

Liquorice had gotten up without anyone realizing, holding a long knife in her hand. And the tip...was drenched in Aeon's blood.

"Aeon-san!"

"Aeon!"

Boudicia and I screamed at the same time, but before we could reach Aeon, Liquorice stood in front of us, pointing the blade at us.

"Sugar-san, I'll crush this woman, too."

"No can do. Remember, she's my *best friend*. And you know why we came here, right? Oh well. We have to move on because we're busy."

"... *Absolutely*, Sugar-san."

Sugar showed a satisfied smile at Liquorice's answer and tried to leave the store.

"You shit! How could you!"

"Boo-san, please wait!"

"Don't stop me!"

"It's dangerous!"

I stood in front of Boudicia, covering her with my back. I feel the exact same way right now...However, Liquorice still had her knife directed at us. If Boudicia were to run to Aeon's aid, she might really get killed by Liquorice before even Sugar could intervene. I glanced over at Aeon. He was losing dangerous amounts of blood. He needed immediate treatment, and quickly.

"Okie-dokie, Boo-chan. Let's meet again." Sugar turned around to give Boudicia a wink.

Meanwhile, Liquorice had the knife directed at us as she slowly stepped backward, leaving the room. Before they even fully vanished from the shop window, we already ran toward Aeon. I tried to help him up, but his body was heavy. Only thanks to Boudicia did I succeed.

"Aeon!"

"...Boudicia. Don't worry about it. *I am responsible for this.*"

His sunglasses fell to the ground, revealing his devastated gaze.

"No! It's all Sugar's fault! Nothing more, nothing less!"

"I...couldn't lead him...If back then, I had..."

As Boudicia held Aeon's hand, I tried to press down on his wound. However, more and more blood came gushing out, and I couldn't stop it myself. So, I used one hand to call an ambulance. But with my hands drenched in blood, my fingers quivering in fear and terror, I struggled.

"Listen to me. The reason Sugar came to Bristol is probably..."

"Stop talking already!"

"Aeon-san! The ambulance will be here in a bit! Don't give up!"

"I...always...have regrets...And...*leave you behind...*"

"Aeon! Wake up! Hey!"

The ambulance only arrived a few minutes after Aeon closed his eyes. We let the people handle everything, and watched the ambulance drive off into the distance. The police hadn't gotten here yet. So, Boudicia and I just stood around in a daze outside the store. A few citizens had gathered, gazing inside the store only to scream. The blood was stuck to our bodies, dried already. My phone probably wasn't off much better. It's waterproof, so I should be able to wash it off. It was shocking that I could even think about something inconsequential like that, but it was most likely because the reality hadn't quite sunk in yet.

Next to me, Boudicia stared at Aeon's shop with a void expression. Her face had blood glued to it, too. But, I quickly realized that, with my own blood hands, that wouldn't work—*Let's fill this town with artists*. I just stared at the large billboard in front of me in a daze. And then, a strong wind blew. It was a hot wind, almost scorching hot. When I realized that it was a shockwave, I quickly stood in front of Boudicia to protect her. A roaring sound rang out, as I closed my eyes.

When I looked back, the store was burning. And then I realized that this gush of wind just now was caused by an explosion. The people around us screamed as we could hear distant sirens. Boudicia was shaking. Because she was angry? Because she was sad? Because she was terrified? I don't know, but I knew I had to do something.

"Let's get away from here."

"Yoshi, I..."

"Look at me. The police will be here soon. If they catch us, it'll only complicate things. You understand, right?"

Boudicia slowly nodded. I took her hand and just started running, as the blood in our hands had already dried.

Advertisement

Chapter 2: “I’m Into Something Good”

The next day was filled with chaos everywhere. The arson incident at the art store, first and foremost. It was played over the news again and again. They suspect it was a terrorist attack, but also stated that the culprit was still on the run, as they kept on repeating the pictures and footage of the burning store. Thankfully, nobody was hurt other than Aeon. But thanks to all of that, the university gave a public announcement and told the students to stay inside as much as possible. According to my friends at uni, some believed this to be the work of a terrorist organization, whereas others doubted that this was set up, and others cursed that the university library was closed due to these circumstances.

And yet, to me, those thoughts and impressions sounded like they came from a different world. Or rather, the people who aren’t involved with graffiti probably are the ones who couldn’t even hope to imagine the situation I was in. And no matter how much I tried to wash it away, my hands were still sullied with Aeon’s blood. At the very least, my phone survived that whole mess, and once I got a call, I left my dorm room.

I opened the electric lock from the inside and heard a loud motor turn. This in turn opened a large but old wooden door, where Boudicia stood. Seeing her bite her lip in silence, I didn’t say a word and just beckoned her inside. We walked through several doors again and finally made it back to my room. Immediately after, Boudicia sacked on my bed, like she was completely out of energy. I sat down on the sofa facing her, and then carefully asked.

“Boo-san, how is Aeon-san?”

“...He’s alive. For now.”

“Thank god...”

I sighed in relief, hearing that we avoided the worst-case scenario.

“The doctor said it was a miracle. If his muscles had been any thinner, his organs would have popped.” Boudicia gently ran her fingers along her sides, like she was the one who was stabbed.

I don’t blame her. They’ve known each other for such a long time, this must be an even greater shock for her. And it was weird, to begin with. Seeing Aeon falter like that, only to be stabbed by Liquorice... Something was off about him that day. He spoke of regret...So, maybe he had known that Sugar would eventually come to him.

“His name was Sugar-san, right? He was scary. And I had no idea what he was thinking.”

I just blurted out what I was thinking. I couldn’t comprehend a word that Sugar was saying. And it wasn’t a problem of my lack of English skill, but rather that...a part deep down within me denied his words.

“I heard rumors that he’s getting involved in some weird stuff...But he wasn’t the type of person to do that.” Boudicia formed fists on her lap.

“What...kind of person was he?”

“All we did was write together, really. No way we’ve been best friends as he likes to call me. One day, he just ran off to London, and that’s it. He hasn’t even contacted us since then, and yet, why now...”

I could clearly tell Boudicia was shaken by this. It was clear how much Sugar has changed. If he was the type of dangerous person who wouldn’t hesitate to burn down a store, I doubt she would have spent time with him.

“Do you know that Liquorice-san person that was with him?”

“No clue. But, she probably belongs to a gang. Rumors said that Sugar was involved with some gang.”

I remembered Liquorice once more. And looking at her gaze, it was

clear that she didn't live an upright life.

"The news said it was an explosion, but..."

More accurately, they said the bomb was a TATP. TATP is short for triacetone triperoxide, which is a material that is very unstable but relatively easy to acquire. That's why most bomb incidents and scenarios usually start with one of those. However, I had no idea how Sugar even placed a bomb like that inside the store.

"A spray can." She tightly formed fists on her lap.

"A spray...can?"

We were facing Sugar and Liquorice that entire time. There was only a moment where we didn't have a clear vision of them, namely when Sugar walked between the shelves. It must have been then. He probably placed the bomb right then and there. And since he was wearing that big hoodie, we had no way of telling him that he carried something with him. And as they say, if you want to hide a tree, then do it inside a forest. He simply set it to blow up once everything was set and done.

I felt a shiver run down my spine. He planned on blowing up Aeon's store from the very beginning. And someone as dangerous as that... was now walking around Bristol. I looked at Boudicia, who still sat on the bed. Her long eyelashes cast a shadow on her face, as I couldn't clearly see her expression.

"What will happen from now on?"

"Why are you asking me?! I...I don't know, either!" She shot up from the bed, grabbing my collar.

"Boo-san..."

Her blue eyes were filled with countless emotions, mixed together, and then disappeared. Seeing that, I regretted saying anything at all. Surely, she must want to know what exactly we should do now, too.

"...I'm sorry."

“No, that’s my bad.”

She must have regained her composure, as she let go of me. It felt like she might fall into the depths of hell if she lowered her hand, so I grabbed it immediately.

“Yoshi...”

“Let’s go. Lara-san is waiting for us.”

*

Boudicia and I arrived at the Bearpit, where the crew had already gathered. So many people were talking at the same time that I struggled to pick up any coherent conversation, but it was clear they were riddled with worry and anxiety. Finally, the tall JF spotted us in the distance and spoke to Lara next to him. Her bluish-green sparkled in the sunlight. Her eyes were even sharper than usual, vividly reflecting us.

“So you’re here.”

Lara jogged over toward us, grabbing Boudicia’s arm. She then pulled her in front of the crew, which I watched in silence. Surely, there is something she must do right now.

“Boo, you explain everything first.”

“Me?”

“Please. You know more than we do.”

Lara’s tone was as heavy as Boudicia’s. That’s all she said, as she stood next to Boudicia and crossed her arms. Boudicia stuffed her hands into her pockets, looking at Lara’s face. Lara nodded once, and Boudicia realized that any arguing was futile.

“...It’s Sugar.”

Even that name had the whole crew gasping. From that alone, I guess that Sugar was very influential and famous.

“That’s the guy who’s done in Aeon.”

“So that means...”

“Yeah, of course. He’s not alone. He had some wench called Liquorice with him. I bet people from the gang are going around town right now.”

I didn’t miss the second Lara formed a fist. She sighed, raised her head, and then faced the writers.

“Listen up, everyone. Sugar is a writer from London. He was supposedly here in Bristol, but he teamed up with a gang to do as he pleases. The gang’s name is **Sweet Tooth**. What a ridiculous name.”

The crew listened to what Lara had to say. And hearing the name of the gang, I remembered Sugar’s fetish for sweet food.

“**Sweet Tooth** has reigned over London for a long time. Nobody could hope to compete against them. And eventually, they got tired of just London. Brighton, Portsmouth, Reading, Southampton, Oxford...They slowly started swallowing up all the cities around London. And now, it’s probably Bristol’s time. We heard reports that they already moved on to Bath, but they were a lot faster than we anticipated.”

“Um, Captain? What happened to the cities that got conquered by Sugar and the others?” Peni asked timidly, only to have his question answered by JF.

“I went to Southampton the other day, and it was no easy sight. The entire town was messed up with graffiti everywhere. I thought I walked into Mexico or Johannesburg.”

“Was it because of the gang?”

Hearing my question, Lara nodded and raised her index finger.

“Yes. They are using graffiti to make everything their own area. And wherever you see that graffiti, it means that it’s their *turf*.”

“But that’s so one-sided...”

“If you touch their graffiti, the gang will come after you. And thoroughly, no less. Whether you’re an average citizen, a writer, a member of another gang, or even the police, they make sure to thoroughly crush you and every resistance. What do you think that means?”

“Nobody will approach places with graffiti...”

“Exactly. And once that happens, they are free to do as they please. It turns into a breeding ground for drugs, prostitution...and, I don’t think you need to hear more than that.”

By growing the area of graffiti, they obtain a wider area of their turf. And then, they can choose whatever illegal method to earn money, which then turns into an expendable fortune to make the gang flourish more. It’s an endless circle of growth.

“But that’s not just any gang *beef*...It’s a genuine *invasion*, right?”

All places with graffiti are their territory. It was utterly selfish to even say that. No matter how much you value graffiti and appreciate its cultural value, it still is just art drawn on walls. But, by adding violence and attacks in the mix, the graffiti holds genuine power. And that’s what Lara was saying. But then, there’s something else on my mind.

“If the gang wishes to grow their territory...then what is Sugar’s goal?”

He said they were working together because their interests aligned. If so, there must be a goal only he has.

“Honestly, we don’t know a thing about him. I never once met him directly myself...” Lara glanced over at Boudicia.

She is the one person right now who knows the most about Sugar. However, she kept her head low, not sharing Lara’s gaze. Meanwhile, the other writers were feeling anxious because the name of another gang popped up. The way I saw it, two main emotions filled their expressions—*Confusion* and *fear*. And needless to say, Lara picked up on this.

“This isn’t anything to falter over. Sure, the other cities might have gotten done in, but...we are different. This is Bristol. What’s important is that we don’t allow them to write their graffiti. We cannot let them grow their turf. So, if we band together and overwrite their work, we can make it through this.”

Her words, originating from such a small body, turn into shockwaves that passed through the rows of people. It allowed the gang to calm down and find a connected cause.

“Right now, the fate of Bristol lies within our hands. That’s why...let us fight. Let us rebel. To protect...our town!”

And yet, Boudicia stood at the outside of this ring. While Lara was talking, she had her head cast low, biting her lips. Naturally so, I’d wager. Someone important to her arrived in her town to cause havoc. I could barely even hope to understand the pain she must feel. I felt like no matter what I could say it would all sound like empty lies. That’s why I gently placed my hand on her back. Even if that didn’t save us from this predicament.

“With that decided, it’s time for a strategy meeting. JF.”

“Aye aye, Captain. First, take a look at this map.”

Under the orders of the Captain, JF placed a tablet on the table in front of me, as the rest of the crew moved closer. Shown on there were several pins.

“Right now, **Sweet Tooth**’s is focussing around the Bristol Temple Meads station. And from then, it’s slowly spreading toward the Bearpit.”

“Are these numbers correct?” Peni gazed down at the display, as he asked.

“Yeah. We split up and counted. The graffiti is everywhere, and we have no way of knowing how much manpower they have on them.” JF operated the tablet, showing pictures.

Shown on there was graffiti in the shape of rotten candy, emitting a poisonous aura. Staring at it for a while, I was feeling dizzy. Even if it

wasn't related to any graffiti, I doubted most people would be willing to approach graffiti like that.

"As you can see, they may have the numbers, but their work is sloppy. So unethical, I swear." JF sighed and shook his head.

"Yes. We've definitely got greater skill than them, so we should work on overwriting them with confidence."

"Um, Lara-san?"

"What's wrong, Yoshi?"

"But this is...dangerous, right?"

Lara didn't answer. That attitude itself acted as plenty of a response, but I struggled to accept it and asked again.

"You said that everybody who dared to lay their hands on the graffiti will be punished, right? And they are supposed to be thorough with that. I mean, we're talking about the people who stabbed Aeon-san and blew up his store. What will happen if you dare to overwrite their graffiti..."

This wasn't just a war fought with graffiti. Yet, they're supposed to be fighting back against people using explosives...by spraying graffiti on walls? That's what it sounded like to me, at least. But Lara seemingly saw right through my worries and smiled gently.

"Yoshi, you're correct. A bloody war like this does not fit our Bristol." She sighed, as JF tapped me on the shoulder.

"I get how you feel, Yoshi. But, that's all we can do about it."

"JF-san..."

"The police are strictly against graffiti. So if they get mixed up in this, we'll all get sacked up."

"I get that, but even so..."

Lara continued after JF.

“Personally, I’d love for the police to handle this, myself. However, both the city council and police will see this as a struggle between graffiti gangs. Sooner or later, they will give out orders for public safety, and they don’t care if they are writers who came from London or have been from Bristol this entire time. The decay of public safety will be pinned on graffiti. That’s why they’ll purge it all. But, we have to protect our culture.”

“But!”

Before I realized it, I had begun screaming already. I knew that nothing good would come from clashing with Lara’s determination. Because I’m not the one who is hit hardest by this. It’s Lara herself. But even so, I couldn’t let this stand.

“Being lumped into the same box with the gang only because you’re writing graffiti...Not even being saved by the city council or the police...Yet you’re not even at fault! How could this be okay?”

“It’s not okay, of course.” Lara narrowed her eyes, as she saw right through my half-baked determination. “But even so, we chose graffiti. Or rather, we made this decision without even being fully aware. We stand here, holding the spray paint in our hands. That’s all we need. We can only live like this. And we’ve already made up our minds.”

In truth, I had felt it in my heart. The tension runs through the Bearpit. Everyone realized a war was approaching. And then, I felt it in my own heart. What I am fearing, and what I am trying to fight against.

“Captain, overwriting is one thing...But how long do we have to fight? I don’t think they’ll just call it quits right away.”

“Good question, JF. All we can do is buy time. We have to make Sugar give up, and satisfy him with graffiti that cannot be overwritten no matter what. We have to make him give up in Bristol. And the only one who can do that...”

I immediately realized why I felt so anxious. Lara’s gaze moved over to Boudica. Following that, everyone looked at her.

“...Boo, it's you.”

Boudicia kept her head hanging low. That's not it. She doesn't know what to write. She doesn't know where to turn to. She shouldn't have to carry such a heavy burden right now. But, I had to suppress my urge to say that out loud. I can't mistake this. It's her problem. Or rather, it will turn into a problem for the whole town, but that doesn't involve me. Boudicia had closed her eyes, thought about it for what felt like an eternity, and then opened them again.

“...Got it. Either way, I have to bring things to a conclusion. I'll do it.”

I could tell that all the writers in the Bearpit sighed in relief in unison. Everyone believed that things could be saved with the Ghost by their side. I closed my eyes, in hopes that nobody would notice. Is this really okay? No, it must be. She'll inherit it all. And the meeting proceeded under the assumption that she would face Sugar, unrelated to my feelings.

“But, Aeon's shop got done in. We do have a lot of spray on stock, but there's no way that won't be enough to overwrite all of that.”

“You don't have to worry about that, then.” Lara laughed off Peni's worries, snapping her fingers once.

Immediately after, JF brought a trolley, taking off the vinyl cover. This revealed a mountain of cardboard boxes, all stacked up. What stood out the most was the one box that had a 94 cut into it, allowing you to see inside. And there were many others exactly like that.

“Did you think I haven't learned from the time they proceeded to purge the Bearpit? I prepared for any possibility of us being able to acquire spray again.”

“As expected of the Captain!”

“If our city were to get swallowed up by their graffiti, then the gang will run us over. We can't let them do as they please. If we find anyone from London, then have at it. Tell them that this city is the holy ground of graffiti!” Lara raised one fist into the air, as her beryl-

green hair shook.

"All on board! We will not let them have Bristol! We are Bristol!"

The whole crew raised cheers, as they grabbed a can of spray.

"Hey, Yoshi."

Watching this, Lara called out to me with an expression completely different from before.

"It might be better if you don't come here anymore."

"...Why?"

"You should know that better than anybody else." Her green eyes looked at me, acting as a reflective mirror to show me my true feelings. *"As a friend*, I want you to get *home* safely. That's my duty as a citizen of Bristol."

I couldn't say anything.

"It's okay. This is our problem, and we'll handle it." Lara placed one hand on my shoulder.

I couldn't argue with her. Just by calling me her friend, I could feel the warmth.

"Lara, are you being serious?"

That is why Boudicia's anger surprised me.

"Serious? Boo, you must feel the same way, no?"

"No, I don't. Not at all. Lara, you're *scared*, right?" Boudicia asked with a serious expression.

"What was that? Come on, say that again, Boo."

"Aren't I right? You're scared. You're worried that you might actually lose. That's why you're trying to keep Yoshi away."

Lara remained silent, looking at Boudicia. And she continued.

“Sure, he’s not a writer. Nor is he a citizen here in Bristol. He has no reason to put his life on the line. But...if not for Yoshi, I wouldn’t be writing anymore. And Gabriel may have succeeded in crushing the graffiti in Bristol. Am I wrong?”

I grit on her words. So that my heart wouldn’t burn away, I gently placed my hand on my chest. I didn’t know she felt that way.

“That’s why...Now, he’s *one of us*.”

Lara closed her eyes, sighed once, and then apologized.

“...You’re right. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. I’m happy you were worried about me.”

Before I realized it, I had already formed a fist with my hand.

“But, I want to help you. *As a friend*.”

Lara narrowed her eyes and smiled.

“Thank you, Yoshi.”

“That being said, I don’t have any idea what I should do...”

“Nobody knows that. I’m no exception.”

Boudicia grinned. I knew she was forcing herself to smile. Even so, she was trying to stay positive.

“Then you can have this, Yoshi.” Lara took something out of her bag, handing it to me.

At first glance, it looked like a metallic, black pen. But it must be aluminum because it didn’t feel as heavy once it was in my hand.

“What is this?”

“A self-protection type of pen. Use it if the need ever arises.”

“Quite *unsettling*.”

“Not being prepared at all is even more *unsettling*.”

I thanked Lara and then stuffed the pen into my pocket.

“Hmph, I don’t need some nonsense like that. I’ll just beat up whoever comes too close to me.”

“Personally, I would prefer if you beat Sugar through your graffiti, and not violence.”

“Shut up! I know that!”

Lara only poked fun at Boudicia for a moment, as a pleasant air drifted between us. It’s almost like we weren’t in such a dire situation, to begin with.

“...You know, Boo. I’m aware that you’re in a bit of a predicament.” Lara said, albeit hesitating. “But, this is something only you can do. After Sugar left, you became the king of Bristol, right?”

“Lara...”

“That’s why we have to rely on you...Ghost of Bristol.”

“...Got it, Captain Lara.”

The two shook hands and then embraced each other. I felt the back of my throat growing hot, as I suppressed the tears that were on the verge of coming out. If possible, I wanted to watch their bonds deepen even more. But not in an emergency situation like this, and rather when everything was peaceful.



I want things to return to that state. I want Bristol to be peaceful...
Even if that doesn't include me in the picture.

*

At night, we gathered at the Christmas Steps. The ancient stairs made of stone looked even older because of the orange street lights shining down on them. Today, Boudicia and I planned to walk around Bristol

and look for Sugar's graffiti. We hesitated if we shouldn't go around during the day, but both options were about as dangerous, so we chose to meet up at night to at least avoid the police. We headed southeast of Bristol, crossing the small Bristol Bridge across River Avon, and then walked alongside Victoria Street.

Just as JF stated, we didn't run into any graffiti from **Sweet Tooth** over here. Understandably so, as we were quite a bit away from Temple Meads station. They probably would reach this area soon at their current speed.

"Yoshi, I said what I said back then, but...Are you sure about this?" Boudicia showed a weak and fragile expression, presumably not just because it was dark out.

She had calmed down quite a lot compared to her heated discussion during the day.

"That's my line. You're in danger just as much as me, Boo-san."

"That's why I'm saying it."

"And I'm here to ensure that nothing bad will happen. If you're cornered or if anything else happens, you'll be all alone. I'm prepared for whatever could come to face us, but let's avoid any *unnecessary risks*."

"Unnecessary risks..." Boudicia muttered and then grimaced. "Is being with me an *unnecessary* risk?"

"Would you have preferred if you had a stronger man by your side?"

"That's not what I meant..."

"I know, I know. I was just kidding. I've gotten better, haven't I?"

Boudicia gave me a sideways glare and snorted.

"I swear. You're so *stubborn*."

"*Who of us?*"

“Both, maybe.”

We then looked at each other and laughed. Why do we keep getting wrapped up in messy situations? I swear, graffiti keeps bringing such a cruel fate with it.

“Hey, look.”

Then, Boudicia suddenly stopped.

“That’s...”

We immediately knew that the graffiti belonged to **Sweet Tooth**. It resembles exactly what JF showed us on his phone. But looking at it in reality, it was even more grotesque, and it really didn’t seem like it took up much time and effort. Looking over at Boudicia, she glanced at the vicinity, spotting several other graffiti.

“So this is the *battlefront*, eh?”

With this sight in front of us, it really felt like the *invasion* was upon us.

“This is different...And this, too. I swear, they’re all wastes of garbage, filling the wall.” Boudicia checked each graffiti she could see.

You could tell it wasn’t done by the same person, but the overall style was similar. It must have been done under Sugar’s orders.

“Are the graffiti from Bristol and London’s graffiti different?”

With so much graffiti in front of me, I had to ask. However, the resulting answer surprised me.

“Mmm, no clue.”

“Huh? You don’t know?” I couldn’t hold that question.

It was rare to hear that from Boudicia of all people. However, her following explanation shed light on it.

“London’s a big city. It’s gathering people from all over the world, so there’s no real ‘London Style’ in that sense. Of course, in the great scheme of things, there are differences. Like comparing New York to Europe, and so on.”

“And what style does Bristol have?”

“It’s a bit more old school if I had to say. Lara’s a lot like that, right? The rest is just split between the other writers.”

Boudicia once explained that old school is a style that has remained for a longer time. Probably the style you’d often see in the 80s when graffiti exploded. Plus, writing in London can’t take too long because of how massive the town is. And, Bristol has become famous for its graffiti, with many citizens understanding that it was like holy ground. Plus, it was an eerie sight to see an entire location buried in graffiti like this.

“Are you not going to overwrite the graffiti here?”

“I’ll be here all night just to slow them down. I’ll leave this to Lara and the folks from **Queen Bear’s Revenge**. I can only focus on what I have to do.”

Something only Boudicia could do...Naturally, that was to win against Sugar. And not just win normally, she will have to make Sugar stop his attack on Bristol. Remembering his confident attitude and innocent smile...And then there’s Liqueur. That sharp glare and absolute composure. Is this really something that we could win? I glanced over at Boudicia, who observed the graffiti on the wall. Her blue eyes were illuminated by the street lamp, shining brightly in the night. Just what were the things she had seen before I met her? It must be a scenery I can’t even imagine.

“Um...what happened between Sugar-san and Aeon-san?”

For a moment, Boudicia tightly put her lips together, which made me regret asking this question. I shouldn’t probe through her past like this. And I’m aware of that. But when she’s in front of me, I lose sight of what is obvious. She closed her eyes for a moment, attempting to suppress the pain, as she raised her head.

“When Sugar was still here, he was seen as the king of Bristol. He was so damn good at graffiti. No matter what graffiti you’d see, he’d easily overwrite it. So cool, seriously. I always wanted to be like him. But, nobody in Bristol could beat him...so he suddenly wandered off to London.”

“I wonder what Aeon-san told Sugar-san.”

Sugar said he remembered what he was told that day.

“I don’t know, either.”

Something was odd this entire time. The reason Boudicia started writing graffiti was Aeon. However, her wild and aggressive style didn’t fit Aeon’s stoic and logical approach. Her style was focused on victory, driven by momentum and hefty strokes, so it would make sense that Sugar acted as a strong influence. That being said, I wonder how Boudicia really feels about Sugar. While suppressing the uneasiness that grew in my heart, I continued.

“So then, when the Ghost and the Captain...When you and Lara-san fought for the seat of the king, that was...”

“After Sugar left, yeah. And I haven’t won against him even once.” Boudicia looked at both her hands.

These words felt heavy. After all, this meant she couldn’t win against Sugar even with her dominant right hand.

“...Aeon felt responsible, you know. That he didn’t properly stop Sugar when he said he’d go to London. He wasn’t like this back then. Sure, Aeon might have seen the danger, but there was no sight of him getting involved with gangs. That’s why...I have no idea what could have happened to Sugar while he was in London.”

Behind her closed eyes, she must be going through the memories she lived through with Sugar. Fun memories that I don’t know about.

“Anyway, there’s something I wanna ask you, Yoshi.”

“Huh? Um, yes?”

I was bewildered when she suddenly said that. Is there anything she could even ask me now?

“You’re going back to Japan, yeah?”

“...That’s right.”

I regretted my naivety, and the fact that it took me a few seconds to respond, despite the question being this simple. However, I also felt relieved that she knew.

“So...once you go back. Are you gonna play in that band again?”

“Yes, most likely.”

“With that *fox*...With Nelina?”

Hearing that name felt like I was stabbed in the chest. I paused for a moment and then responded.

“Yes...In fact, Nelina-san told me to come home. That she can’t stretch out the contract any longer.”

In a lot of ways, I couldn’t run away any longer. That’s what I told Boudicia. And after a brief pause, she then spoke up with a nonchalant tone.

“Hm, I see. *Good for you.*”

“Good...”

I didn’t understand. How did she feel while saying this? Because of the streetlamp’s light, I could not see her expression. The nights in the UK are dark, leaving me unable to see anything, in fact. Why... am I even here again? Why am I with her right now? But then, Boudicia turned around and ran. She melted into the night, and I almost lost her.

“W-Wait for me!”

I chased after her, as she stopped at a wall a bit further ahead, staring at it.

“No mistaking it. I can tell at a glance.” She rubbed her hand along the wall, muttering to herself.

Personally, I couldn't tell how this graffiti was different from the one before. It didn't look that much better than the ones before.

“Look at this part.” Boudicia touched the side of the graffiti.

There, I could see red painting material, sprayed on the wall like blood.

“That's a needle cap. The part where the spray comes out looks like a small narrow pipe.

I remembered something along those lines.

“I think I used this before when I was taking care of my guitar...”

“When you use that, it turns the nozzle into a sharp spray. Like you're spraying water with a hose. This one's super difficult to do, and it's also what Sugat excels at.”

I looked at the wall again. Just as she said, the normal graffiti with the regular spray didn't stand out much, but I could see small red parts everywhere that looked like blood splatters, and it gave me the creeps.

“Anyway, I'm doing this.”

Boudicia put down her backpack, as the sound of a spray can being shaken resounded through the night. I continued to watch in silence as she overwrote the graffiti. There was no hesitation, no backwater in her movement. She said she became able to draw what she thought up in her head. I could already see the finished shape, as the procedure moved on quickly. It really felt like work, because it went so smoothly.

“All right...”

The finished product was graffiti written in red and black.

“Red Hot...”

So said the rectangular letters that covered the whole work.

“Sugar’s graffiti wasn’t like this. I’m sure he must have gotten influenced by the people around him, but I’m different. I’m...*red hot*.”

It almost sounded like she was telling herself, as she stuffed the spray can back into her bag and put it on her shoulder. Immediately after, we heard someone clapping. Boudicia and I instantly turned around. Then, we heard a voice coming from the shadows.

“Not bad, not bad. You’ve regained some of your intuition, I see. That’s it. That’s the spirit.”

That irregular outfit stood out amidst this pitch-black darkness. And of course, Liquorice followed after him.

“Sugar...Why are you here?!”

“Because I wanted to see the graffiti you’d write, of course.”

“You...You did this on purpose...?”

Sugar grinned.

“Yup. If you don’t beat me, the graffiti won’t stop...Or so you think. But the only ones who can do that... are you, Boo-chan. You knew which graffiti would belong to me, and then proceed to overwrite it if you think you can do better...just as you did.”

Sugar ran his hand along the wall Boudicia had just painted with her graffiti. Despite not much time has passed, it had already dried fully, not dirtying his finger.

“And that’s why I was waiting here.”

Sugar met eyes with Liquorice, as he gave her a signal. She then looked around into the darkness. As a result, several tall people appeared, wearing black and torn-up clothes. And, they were hiding their faces behind black bandanas. I only needed one glance to tell... They were gang members. I instinctively stepped in front of Boudicia.

“Hm? Did we meet before?” Sugar looked at me in confusion.

It's probably because I was never truly in his sight from the very beginning.

"My name is Yoshi. I am Boo-san's...*friend*."

"Hm, really? Ah, do you belong to those *bear* people?"

"No..."

Even now, I didn't have the right answer.

"You know, I really hate that stuff. The *salt*."

"*Salt*...?"

He moved his fingers like he squeezed salt between them.

"That's right. There's sweet food that has salt mixed with it, right? Like salty caramel. I really can't stand that, you know. It's total *disrespect* toward anything that is sweet.

Sugar slowly but steadily walked in my direction. He then twisted his body to look up at me. Our noses were about to touch, and I could pick up a sweet scent from him.

"You're different, right? You won't disrespect me." He was smiling, but the darkness in his eyes felt like it could kill me. "Don't make that kind of face now. You're like a deer caught in the headlights."

He moved his head away, as he put on the top part of his hoodie and danced. In a way, it reminded me of Boudicia. Though, I bet she learned it from him.

"Liquorice-chan, if you would." Sugar gave a brief order, using a tone as if he had just finished his dinner.

Liquorice moved right after. A black shadow moved through the darkness, standing in front of me. The shadow grabbed my arm and pushed it up. My body was pulled after this, as I could hear the air gush out of my throat.

"Ugh...!"

Liquorice stared me in the face, lacking any expression as always. I could not tell what she was thinking.

“Stop it.”

But then, Boudicia grabbed Liquorice’s arm with her left hand.

“Get your hands off him. He’s *one of us*.”

For a moment, Sugar’s eyes opened wide. But then, he burst out laughing.

“So he really is a friend of that *bear whatever thing*! To think I’d witness the day when Boo-chan teams up with others. Hmm...I guess that’s that, then.”

“Sugar-san, what do we do?”

“Do with him as you please. He’s not what I’m looking for.”

What exactly could he be looking for? But before I finished my thought, Liquorice twisted her body and threw me at Boudicia.

“Yoshi!”

She managed to lessen the impact, but still backward. Sugar saw this and let out a satisfied laugh, as he stretched both his arms, cracking his neck.

“Now then, guess it’s time. Give me that.”

“Yes, Sugar-san.”

Liquorice turned toward Sugar, as she took out an object with purple wrapping from her pocket. It was the same chocolate he ate at Aeon’s store. Liquorice carefully unwrapped the package, and then offered it to Sugar. He bit into it and then held his cheeks as he moaned.

“Ahh...this sweetness. I’m feeling great. But, I need more. This isn’t enough.”

He put his open hands together, pushing them towards Liquorice.

Seeing this, Liquorice took off the backpack she carried and handed Sugar two spray cans, which he held in both his hands. He then trotted toward the wall, moving his hands as a trail of colors was born. Despite his nonchalant movement, like he was a dancer on stage, the graffiti born from this was utterly grotesque. And while I was in awe at this gap, the graffiti was already done.

“Not yet.” Sugar said and threw the spray cans at Liquorice.

As if to answer that, she now gave him one in return. The cans spiraled through the air and passed by the other. It was like a circus act of sorts.

“Time to wrap this up.”

There was a small straw that came out from the top part of the spray can he held. It must be the needle cap that Boudicia mentioned just now. When he pressed that down, the paint came out of it, but with an unreliable trail. Even so, Sugar directed this at the wall. And in such a relaxed way, it was like he controlled what was about to be written on the wall.

Okay, done.”

The letters that appeared from that were rotten. The five letters spelling SUGAR were cut up here and there, making the bubble letters look like flesh. From those wounds, you could see the organs, as well as white maggots crawling out of them. At the same time, he had used the needle cap to create blood splatters everywhere. It was such eerie graffiti, I had to suppress the urge to throw up.

“*Applause*,” said Liquorice.

Immediately after, the crew around us applauded. As a musician, I knew how valuable applause was. It is the greatest reward to receive for your performance. However, the applause I heard just now was unlike anything I had ever heard. Put simply, it was like there was no emotion packed into it. It was dull, like sand being scattered on top of a concrete floor. And yet, Sugar didn’t mind that in the slightest, as he opened both his arms, walking around like a star.

At the same time, Liquorice placed one hand on Sugar's shoulder, gently cleaning his face with a small towel. It was all messed up. And yet, neither Boudicia nor I could say anything. After all, the emotion coming from the graffiti was overwhelming. It wasn't the skill with which the trails of graffiti were drawn on the wall. Nor was it the experience we witnessed during this process. It's because we could directly feel it coming out of the graffiti...the absolute and profound dread and terrier.

"I really like those sorts of faces, you know?"

As always, Sugar showed a warm and friendly smile. And even now, he had graffiti stuck to his face.

"Boo-chan, can't you stop writing already? Doing something like this is just utterly boring, don't you think?"

"Th-That's not..."

"Really? Then why are you even writing, Boo-chan?" Sugar opened his arms, waiting for her response.

However, she couldn't continue and just kept her mouth closed.

"She's writing for the sake of Bristol."

My mouth moved before I could think, as I filled the silence.

"And nobody has the right to make fun of her for that."

"For the sake of Bristol...huh? Yeah, that's why this town is too far gone." Sugar sighed and then rumbled with a shrug of his shoulders. "Leaving London, I realized one thing...That Bristol is far too peaceful. Everyone's accepting the fact that graffiti is part of the culture here."

"Because Bristol is the holy ground of graffiti."

"That isn't quite true." Sugar smiled as he narrowed his eyes. "Graffiti is a crime."

"But..."

“No matter how much sweet-talk you throw after it, it doesn’t change the fact that graffiti is *vandalism*. It’s *destruction*. Everyone writes while they’re terrified of being caught. They accept the damage they cause as they write. And then, their finished work immediately vanishes. Dying, killing, being killed, nothing of this is right. That’s why it’s beautiful.” Midway through his sentence, Sugar bit on the chocolate he got from Liquorice. “Yet, look at this town. Everyone’s drawing on the walls. They forget it’s graffiti...And it’s not just that. People are forgetting their *destiny* as a whole.”

He gulped down the chocolate, now stuffing a candy he got from Liquorice. I could hear his teeth hitting the candy with each move of his tongue. And then, he continued.

“Listen up. People die. If you aren’t aware of that at all times, you can’t live properly. If you don’t witness the destruction, you can’t create anything. Only those who know the beauty of all things ending can live a fulfilled life. That’s why I’m going to make sure everyone remembers.” He threw away the wrapping paper. “Right, Liquorice-chan?”

And then, he rammed his knee into Liquorice’s stomach.

“Argh...!”

Her slender body immediately bent and fell to the ground. The crew seemingly wanted to move to help, but Liquorice pointed her palm at them, urging them to stop. Sugar then forced Liquorice up to stand by grabbing her collar. And then—he kissed her. I could see how the red candy moved from his lips into hers.

“Is it delicious?”

“Koff...Y-Yes...”

And then, he rammed his fist right into her face. Liquorice immediately lost her balance again but managed to stand. Her nose started bleeding, as she wiped that with her palm. Normally, you would be utterly furious. And yet, I realized something...that Liquorice’s gaze was weird. I wouldn’t think that she had just gotten punched in the face. There was no fury or even terror. Instead, her

gaze was full of...affection.

“My motto is simple. I told you before, right?”

He must be referring to the fact that he inherited Aeon’s words and teaching. But, it was hard to believe that Aeon would teach him something like this.

“Sugar...I don’t get it. What happened to you?”

“Of course you don’t, Boo-chan. That’s the problem.” Sugar said with a cold voice. “Both the people as well as this whole world...the more they are hurt, the closer they are to death, the more beautiful. And I create beautiful works. I tell people the truth. This is the duty of a *true* artist. *I make the world a better place.*”

I was utterly baffled. Rather than being afraid or annoyed, I just knew that we couldn’t win. Sugar believed he was in the right. And my values can’t accept that. But if that was the beauty of his graffiti, then it was beautiful in its own right. And to show how right he was, he relied on the help of a gang. How could we win?

“Humans are foolish. Nobody is determined to open their eyes to the fate that is life. *I will make you understand.* That is my duty.” Sugar winked at Boudicia, stood next to Liquorice, and then disappeared into the darkness, the gang members following.

While watching them off, Boudicia showed an expression I had never seen before. And to me, that was incredibly painful.



Advertisement

Chapter 3: “Bits and Pieces”

Here we can see the art supply store that was destroyed by the explosion. It was burned to the ground completely, leaving behind rubble and ash. The store’s main business revolved around selling spray cans to graffiti writers, leaving behind immense losses for the community. At the same time, the number of graffiti seen in town has grown even further, leaving the authorities to believe the two cases might be related.

Bristol is known for its graffiti and art, but the police always state the danger that drawings such as those bring drug trafficking and other illegal businesses with them. The purge of the Bearpit, instigated by the city council, didn’t improve the situation, either. And now that public safety in Bristol is beginning to deteriorate, many voice their complaints at the city council.

The camera on the news showed old murals and other tags, as well as the popular works of **Queen Bear’s Revenge** and the new graffiti by **Sweet Tooth** that was used to grow their territory. I knew full well that, on the outside, it all looked the same. Not too long ago, I was just as clueless about it. But now, it is different. I’ve met so many people who are dependent on graffiti. But without anything I could do, I just sighed as I headed for the Bearpit once again. I was worried about the possibility that Sugar’s graffiti had already progressed that far, but thankfully, that wasn’t the case. However, it was just a matter of time, in the end. The frontline for the graffiti had just crossed the nearby River Avon, so it’ll soon start reaching deeper into the center.

The city scenery was always like it was on the edge. As more and more graffiti followed with not enough space, it somehow managed to keep its status quo as a city known for graffiti. However, Sugar and his gang couldn’t care less about the balance. The city was in

disarray. The people were furious, anxious, even, as more and more rumors regarding graffiti went around. The number of police cars driving around even went up in number, too. All this surpassed the idea of regular graffiti...it really was like an *invasion*.

The Bearpit wasn't off much better, as a stiff atmosphere reigned. The writers stood around, gathering as a group but the silence was painful. And who could blame them? Lara immediately issued an emergency statement, too. JF wanted to be of as much help as possible, as he handed out coffee. That being the case, Peni must have been out somewhere else, as I couldn't see him. Boudicia stood in the center of this group, smoking her vape. She was looking down at her smartphone during that time.

"Boo-san, um..."

I remembered Sugar's graffiti from the previous day. How should we even face that head-on? But, I still knew I had to talk with her at least once.

"Yoshi, Lara didn't contact you, right?"

But before I could say anything, she immediately asked me this with a grave expression.

"What happened?"

"That's what I wanna know." Boudicia stomped on the ground.

"I can't get in contact with Peni either. And he should be with her..." JF handed a writer some more coffee, as he rubbed the back of his neck.

"Couldn't this...be pretty bad?"

"JF, do you know where Lara and Peni went?"

"They wanted to overwrite some graffiti at the frontlines. I think it's across River Avon, but they didn't tell me the exact place. Maybe they just haven't seen my messages, but..."

I will make you understand—Sugar's ominous words played in the

back of my head. Boudicia clicked her tongue, as she stuffed her smartphone in her pocket, and walked away.

“W-Wait for me, Boo-san!”

I grabbed her shoulder in the heat of the moment, but she brushed it off quickly after.

“Who knows what might have happened to them! We have to hurry, or Lara will...”

“I’m not saying we shouldn’t look for them. However, it’s dangerous to walk around alone, and you should know that, right? Let’s look together.”

“...Right. Sorry.”

“I’m worried about that, too, so I understand.”

“Yoshi, look after the Ghost. We’ll look for them, too. Contact me immediately if anything happens.”

“Of course.”

Since even JF said that, I quickly took off my glasses to clean them. Once I saw that they were all clean, I could feel myself having a more rational mind. We walked down Rupert Street, then entered Union Street, heading south. Finally, we reached Castle Park, which was a public park built around some old ruins.

“Boo-san, do you have any idea where they might be?”

Since she kept on walking without hesitation, I couldn’t help but ask.

“Gangs always know the towns they visit, even if it’s not their own. And if they’d cause any trouble, then...”

We finally reached the small Bristol Bridge that went across River Avon. And there, Boudicia suddenly stopped.

“...Here.”

She looked toward the end of the bridge, where I could see a small set of stone stairs. Next to that was a black metal trash bin, with graffiti of **Sweet Tooth** written on it. Seeing that, I was surprised by two things. First, I was shocked to see the *battlefront* had progressed this far. And second, this graffiti had been overwritten somewhat leisurely—With the color of beryl green. Boudicia looked at each other, as a cold shiver ran down our spines. We rushed down the black-painted stairs, as we heard a rumbling noise. Ahead of us was a narrow path between a building and the river. Despite it being near the main street of the bridge, it wasn't visible from the opposite shore, acting like a dead angle. And as we arrived there, we looked around to find several silhouettes, collapsed in the shadows. One belonged to a small but chubby man—

“Hey, Peni! You okay?!” Boudicia crouched down as she called out his name.

His body was covered in blood and bruises. She grabbed his shoulders and shook him, rolling him around. Then, we saw bluish-green hair appear from beneath him.

“Ugh...”

“Lara-san!”

Lara groaned, and she didn't look much better than Peni. Her right eye was so swollen she couldn't even open it, as parts of her skin turned purple because the inner blood vessels couldn't keep up anymore. Her beautiful green hair ended up stiff with dried blood. If I had to guess, Peni probably protected her. I knew that he would jump in harm's way for her any day.

“I'm sorry, we were careless...”

“Stop talking, please!”

I checked Lara's body. She's conscious. The blood loss she went through isn't critical, either. She got beaten up badly, but I don't see any stab wounds or other grave injuries. That being said, she may have hit her head, so we can't move her carelessly. As for her neck—And then, my gaze turned toward what was beyond her bloody

shoulder. Her white arm turned mid-way, bending. And her right wrist was completely broken that even I could tell. For a split second, I could feel my view turning snow white. However, the worst-case scenario always arrived at the worst possible timing.

“Hey, Yoshi. Peni...he’s not breathing.” Boudicia’s voice quivered.

“Out of the way!” I pushed her aside and placed my head closer to his mouth.

Normally, I should be feeling a faint circulation of wind, but... nothing. I couldn’t even think, as my body moved on its own. I put my hands together, placing it on his collarbone. Then I pressed my body weight onto him. A heart message is supposed to go at a tempo of 100 times per minute to create a BPM of 100. That’s why I envisioned music with that beat and started. I remember having to do this in high school for a first-aid course. I did the same thing back then as I am now. Still, who could have expected that it would come in handy at times like this? And that’s also why I could only think about one song—*September* by Earth, Wind & Fire.

In my head, this nonchalant and upbeat music played as I kept on pressing my arms on Peni’s chest. Boudicia called the ambulance, and I could hear how she screamed into the phone. Just who said you should think of a song when doing a heart massage like this? The gap between the music and the despair at hand made me want to cry out loud.

“Hey, Boo...Now we’re the same.”

“Shut up!”

After Boudicia finished the call, she ran toward Lara. Her strong and dignified voice now sounded weak, about to snap like an old tree.

“...Sugar is mad. He hurt Peni before me...told him to write. So then, he went to me. But Peni protected me...”

“Sugar again...!”

“...You know, I thought I was the best writer in Bristol at one point.

But, that wasn't the case. I still remember the first time someone overwrote my graffiti. I was moved, I realized I could never beat them. I wondered what kind of person could have written such graffiti...And I wanted to meet them. But imagine my surprise when you turned out to be such a hottie."

"What are you talking about...You're a great writer!"

"It's okay. I know it...I'm not the same caliber."

"That's enough. No more talking. The people from the NHS will be here and then they'll get you all fixed up."

"No matter how hard I work, or how much I pray to God, there are things I can't do. Things I can't have..." Lara moved her uninjured left hand, touching Boudicia's cheek. "Hey, Boo? Did you know...that you have that? Because you're *gifted*. So, please...Protect Bristol's graffiti."

"But I don't know! What am I supposed to do?! Please, just tell me! What should I write?! How can I beat Sugar?! Hey, Lara!"

Lara pushed herself up with her left hand, gently embracing Boudicia.

"I love you. I really do...*Just the way you are.*"

Her voice was as gentle as always. So much so that you didn't know who was on the ground, beaten up. And...that's just like her. Lara will always be Lara. Boudicia's tears fell down onto Lara's cheeks, mixing with her tears, only to fall down onto the stone pavement... But Peni still isn't breathing. Will it all...will it all really end here?

...No, I won't let that happen. As despair filled every cell of my body, the disco music in my head continued to play louder. Do you remember? The dance we shared on the 21st of September. The golden dream illuminating our days—

"Peni-san, please. Come back. Lara-san is in trouble. If you're not here, then who will protect her...who will protect Bristol?!"

As if he answered my screams, I could hear a faint cough—as Peni's heart began beating again. He breathed in like he had been about to

drown down in the ocean, as his whole body filled with air again.

“Are you guys okay?!”

I raised my head when I saw JF running at us from the backlight. Behind him, I could see the rescue workers wearing their neon yellow vests. They swiftly placed Peni and Lara on the stretchers, carrying them away. I was worried about how they would handle that narrow path, but there was a slope close by. They then asked me a few questions, turned on the sirens, and drove away. JF had gone with them, as he suddenly vanished without a trace. Only then did I realize that I was completely beside myself in rage. And as the sirens turned more distant, I could hear Boudicia’s disrupted breathing. She had her head turned sideways, looking at something in the distance. The graffiti that was drawn on the wall where we found Peni and Lara collapsed. It was evidently written by Sugar, and it read—*Let’s see*.

“Shit...”

A spray can had fallen to the ground right there, picked up by Boudicia,, and she pointed it at the wall. I heard the familiar sound of spray being applied, together with the scent drifting toward my nose.

“Shit...Shit, shit, shit!”

But what came out of the spray can wasn’t paint or air. Rage, regret, despair...or possibly everything combined. Either way, it wasn’t even qualified to be called graffiti. It was just a raw emotion slammed onto the wall. After she was done, she threw the spray can at the wall, which fell behind the narrow path.

“This isn’t good enough! Not good at all! I can’t win like this! Why am I...”

She swung her fists around, but I stopped her right before she could hit the wall.

“Please stop, Boo-san!”

“Let me go!”

Her arms flung everywhere, as she hit my face and slapped the glasses off me, but I still held onto her.

“I won’t let go! What good will come from you hurting your hands?!”

“They...they would have been okay with Peni dying! And Lara’s arm, too! Coming this far...it’s all my fault!”

“No, it isn’t!”

“I couldn’t beat Sugar! I couldn’t fight back! Against someone like him...!”

“Please, calm down. It’s okay. Let’s think about it together. We’ll find a way.”

“Peni...Lara...and Bristol...All because of...”

As she began to weep, I gently embraced her. How did things escalate this far? That was all I could think about at that moment. Boudicia, Lara, Peni, JF, and everyone from **Queen Bear’s Revenge**...They all wrote graffiti, overwrote it, fought over it, and then created something better. Why can’t we just keep living like this? Why can’t I protect anybody? And as all these questions came together to be stirred up inside the pot that was my mind, one thought stuck out. Why is Sugar even going this far? Stabbing Aeon, beating up Lara and Peni...He said he did it to make Bristol his own.

He’ll teach people the truth, he said. Surely, he wasn’t lying when he said that. But, was this really his only goal? I didn’t know, and since I had no clues, that thought quickly returned to nothingness. And as I could feel Boudicia in my arms, the same lyrics of the music replayed in my head.

Do you remember? The dance we shared on the 21st of September. The golden dream illuminating our days—

*

I somehow managed to have Boudicia calm down, and I pulled her to the Bearpit. I just wanted to get her to safety, to a place where we could rest. Surely, my dorm room may have been better, but because

of how weak and fragile she was, I feared she wouldn't leave my room ever again. When I saw JF standing in the Bearpit, I sighed in relief. He sat at a table, staring down at the surface of the coffee he just brewed. I looked around to glance at the other writers, leaving him baffled. Most of them carried some sort of injury. Some had bandages wrapped around their heads, others around their arms. And although I wasn't too certain about that, it felt like the general number of writers had lessened. It was obvious what had happened. They all got done in by Sugar and the gang.

"...You guys. Well, have some coffee. Though I can't offer burritos along with that."

JF saw us and stepped inside the kitchen car, bringing back two cups of coffee. I remembered Peni's smile when he'd work on his burritos. But with no Peni, there can be no burritos. And this reality weighed down on us.

"JF-san, how are Lara-san and Peni-san...?" I carefully asked.

"The captain's arm is completely broken. It can be fixed, but they can't tell if she'll be able to move it the same way as before. Peni's got beaten up so bad he has broken bones all over, but his life isn't in danger."

"Is that so..."

"It's because you saved him. Thanks a lot, seriously."

"I didn't really..."

Even the usually tall JF looked much smaller for some reason. I couldn't say that I was glad. Because it was still hard to say if he was fully saved.

"I bet the guys in Southampton got done in just like this. It's not that they didn't try to overwrite, they probably couldn't. Because they'd end up in a world of pain. They don't just grow their turf, they also break the hearts of those who rebel."

It was a logical argument. Everybody knew of the dangers this could bring. And they were prepared for this. However, even they must

have been surprised at how heartless and cruel this invasion proceeded.

“...Hey, Ghost. I’ve been thinking.” JF called out to Boudicia, who still had her head hanging low. “Ain’t this the perfect time?”

Boudicia’s head shot up.

“They’re too evil. We can’t win against them. So even if the whole city’s full of their graffiti, we can just write on the open spaces. We just gotta stay away from those gang folks. Even if they use this place for drugs or prostitution, it’s not our job to stop them. That’s up to the police. Don’t you agree?”

“JF, what are you...” Boudicia muttered, her voice devoid of any emotion.

“I couldn’t protect the Captain. Same goes for Peni. And I bet everyone here feels the same way.”

Looking around, the other writers were all looking at us.

“No. The one who couldn’t protect anything was me. I let them do that. I couldn’t stop them. That’s it. If I can just overwrite Sugar’s graffiti...”

“I don’t hate you, you know. In fact, I *respect* you. Everybody knows how talented you are. You opened the future for us back then. You’re the best writer out of all of us, and we accept that...Though we feel bad for making you carry all of this, and honestly, we feel pathetic.” JF played with the cup in his hand, as his cold coffee drew circles. “But...that’s exactly why you should stop here if you have no intention of fighting anymore.”

“Huh? No intention of fighting...?”

“Don’t try to force yourself, Ghost. We know that Sugar’s a senior of yours. And fighting your old allies is too cruel.”

“That’s not the problem here! He and I are...”

“Then, can you beat him?”

“That’s...”

“Do you think you can beat Sugar? Do you really want to protect Bristol?” JF slowly stood up, as he glared down at Boudicia. “Don’t underestimate me. Everyone can tell when looking at your graffiti. You’re not going all out right now.”

“No! I’m not holding back!”

“Then why did your graffiti change?”

“How would I know that?! It’s...I just don’t know what to write!” Boudicia hit her fist into her thigh several times.

Seeing that, JF closed his eyes, sighed, and sat down again.

“...Nobody’s blaming you. But, with the Captain and Peni like that... we gotta decide what we do next. You get that, right?”

Boudicia had her head hanging low, not answering. When overwriting, you have to either make it something harder to accomplish or better looking. It’s the rule that decides victory or defeat with graffiti. But it wasn’t like a sport where you would earn points. But even so, there was a clear differentiation between victory and defeat. And that’s why Boudicia was this hurt. Because Sugar was more talented as a writer...as an artist. It was an undeniable fact.

“How pathetic. Are you even aware that you are shouldering the culture of Bristol?”

And as we were in the pits of despair, an arrogant and confident voice broke the silence. The voice came from the entrance of the Bearpit, immediately changing the air. Everyone looked toward the source of the voice, which turned out to be a white pigeon.

“Gabriel-san! Why are you here?”

His expression remained calm as always, responding with a peaceful tone.

“*That is not a good question.* Let me return one, instead. Why do you think I’m here?”

Boudicia raised one eyebrow.

“Not to give graffiti the final push over the edge...right?”

“If so, then I’d stay silent about it. Because you’ll get crushed eventually. Through a falling-out with fellow graffiti writers, no less. And such a turf war...As I thought, music was superior, after all.”

“You bastard!”

“Boo-san, calm down!”

My hand that tried to stop her ran into empty air, as she grabbed Gabriel’s collar. On that Christmas day, during the war between music and graffiti, we faced Gabriel. Actually, saying “we” isn’t accurate. Because Nelina and I sided with the music. In the end, the winner or loser ended up vague, but Gabriel accepted the graffiti writers in Bristol. Of course, this included Boudicia, but they still weren’t on the best of terms. And personally, I didn’t like seeing two artists I liked clash like this.

“Ghost, you never change, huh? As *wild* as always.”

“If I’m *wild*, then you’re a *coward*.”

“...I heard about Captain Lara. What a shame, really?”

“...!”

When Gabriel brought up Lara’s name, Boudicia’s grip on his collar loosened. Gabriel rubbed his white neck and then continued.

“I have only one goal. To turn Bristol into a city with cultural value. Though, I had expected you all to understand that already.”

Truth be told, Gabriel and graffiti themselves stood on opposite sides. However, Gabriel understood its cultural value by the end. If not, then graffiti would have probably vanished from Bristol on that Christmas night, even before this whole invasion happened.

“I made a comment on the current situation.”

Gabriel took out his phone and operated it. He must be opening his social media.

“The question I posted online went like this: *There is good graffiti and bad graffiti. Do you have the eyes to tell them apart?*.” He said and handed me the smartphone.

Shown there was a picture of **Queen Bear’s Revenge** graffiti, as well as one made by **Sweet Tooth**, together with Gabriel’s comment. And below that were the comments made by other people.

‘The city council should get rid of these drawings already.’

‘The right one’s awful to look at, but the left one is drawn beautifully.’

‘I just don’t want public safety to take any more of a dip.’

‘Is there going to be more violence?’

‘The right one isn’t from Bristol, right? Must be from the outside.’

‘I didn’t have a problem with the graffiti before, but lately, it’s getting hard to look at.’

‘I was against the purge of the Bearpit.’

‘Just get rid of everything other than Banksy’s stuff.’

‘Graffiti is our culture here. Not just Banksy, we should protect all their works.’

“This is...”

A lot of comments spoke against graffiti in general, but there were two who actually were able to differentiate the graffiti. They could tell that one graffiti didn’t belong to Bristol.

“The citizens of Bristol are sensitive when it comes to that. They hold the power to make their opinions and work towards that. Sometimes, it can get a bit extreme, though.” Gabriel said and stuffed his phone back into his pocket. “And the city council definitely doesn’t like his

whole incident. After all, it's threatening the safety of the citizens. It wouldn't be weird for them to aggressively go against all and every graffiti."

Lara anticipated this, too, and it's an expected answer. Especially from the city council. If the choice is between culture and public safety, it's easy. And yet, Gabriel continued.

"If more people voice their support for graffiti as a part of Bristol's culture, it will act as a force to silence the opposition. However, the best they can do is buy time. *Do you understand?*" He said and looked directly at Boudicia.

"...So what am I supposed to do?"

"I think you should know the answer to that already."

"*But...*"

"*No buts.* This is something only you graffiti writers can do. And it's not just anybody else's business. The culture of Bristols rests on your shoulders. No culture can grow in a world ruled by a violent gang like them. Do you think music has any chance to survive when violence and drugs fill the streets?" Gabriel waved his hand about, as he looked into the eyes of every writer present.

Despite them having been enemies not too long ago, they now listened in silence.

"If I could save Bristol with my own hands, then I would have done so already. However, I'm not the one who is fighting right now. It's you. Who is fighting is not the question...It's if you will fight. You have two choices. *Yes* or *No*. And you are the ones who will decide that. All I can do is say one single word." Gabriel paused and looked around.

And then, he slowly opened his mouth—

"*Please.*"

I was utterly baffled to hear Gabriel use these words. To see Gabriel rely on others. It helped me realize how dire the situation was.

“Even I...Even I want to do something about this...But, I don’t know...”

If we can’t stop Sugar, this *invasion* won’t stop. And as an artist, the only way to stop Sugar is by using graffiti. The city council and police won’t ally with us...Really? Do we really have nobody in this town who will ally with graffiti? A single light lit up in my mind.

“...Let’s stop this.”

“Yoshi?”

“Well, you heard it. Sorry Gabriel, but...”

I saw that Boudicia and JF carried the wrong impression, so I quickly corrected myself.

“You’re wrong. We’re going to stop overwriting. We’ll stop trying to overrule their graffiti.”

“Yoshi, what are you talking about? That’ll just leave them to do as they please. How is that any different from stopping to resist?”

“I actually talked with Sugar-san directly.”

JF looked at me in confusion, blinking several times.

“He’s twisted and rotten.”

“Well, I don’t expect any sane person to pull some insane shit like this.” He sighed and crossed his arms.

“The problem isn’t his nature by any means. Our common sense won’t get through to him. It’s impossible to even converse with him normally. However, he has his own *logic...Concept*, even.”

“Really? But, he’s having most of the crew going around writing the graffiti for him, as he stays behind, right? His main goal should be to spread their territory, shouldn’t it?”

“The true nature of graffiti is destruction...and the essence of people is to die. That’s why he made it his job to show that to us...That’s

what he said, and that's why he sees himself as an artist. That's why he's completely messing up the town."

"That's so messed up..." JF dropped his arms.

I understand how he must feel. I was the same at first.

"If their graffiti is being overwritten, then he will use the gang to fight back. Then the writers will suffer the same fate as Lara-san or Peni-san. Because the places where the graffiti is written already belong to **Sweet Tooth**. Fighting there puts us at a severe disadvantage."

Looking around, the Bearpit was wrapped in silence. The writers that had focussed their gazes on Gabriel looked at me. And, I regretted that I talked this much. I'm an outsider. A stranger. Someone who shouldn't be here...But, I completely forgot about that.

"...Yoshi, what do you think we should do?"

Boudicia, who had listened in silence so far, now looked at me. And then, I realized. They were waiting for me to say something. So, I closed my eyes and breathed in. At least for now, I decided to forget it all. That I haven't been living here for long, that I'm not a member of this crew, that I'm not a graffiti writer, that I will return to Japan soon...and everything else, too. Instead, I'll do what I can for the sake of this town...No, for the people who are with me. I've received so much from Bristol and its graffiti culture—So now, it's time to give back. I opened my eyes and breathed in.

"I don't think that overwriting is the only method to win. Look at the comments on Gabriel-san's post. There are many people who just lump all graffiti into one pot, but there were also those who could tell which graffiti belonged to Bristol. They even voiced their concern."

"That's true." JF looked at his smartphone, and so did some of the other crew members.

"Let's stop trying to overwrite their graffiti. Instead, *we write first*. The best graffiti this town has seen, and we put it everywhere. We'll fill this city with graffiti. To make it beautiful again. So that the people

living here feel that way.”

“It’s definitely safer than stepping into their turf...” JF looked down at the ground, remembering Peni and Lara, I bet. “But, what if the guys from **Sweet Tooth** overwrite our graffiti? Won’t it all be meaningless?”

“That’s just fine. It’s important that we show everyone the kind of graffiti we write. Then, they should understand that this wasn’t just any regular beef, but a genuine *invasion*.”

“Hey, Yoshi...That means...” Boudicia spoke up.

I could immediately guess what she wanted to say.

“Yes. If we fail to make the citizens think that the city was more beautiful with our graffiti, then this whole operation is pointless.”

“And if they just think of it as meddlesome doodles...” JF scratched his beard, as Gabriel answered that question.

“Then it’ll have the opposite effect. If they just see it as more graffiti being everywhere, the citizens’ disgruntlement will explode, and the city council will start moving right away. Granted, Temple Meads station is a bit further away, so they can turn a blind eye, but when crossing River Avon to come here to the center of Bristol, they won’t let people do as they please. Not even them, that is.” Gabriel said what I was thinking.

It’s a bet, in the end. However, the odds aren’t bad.

“...I didn’t know a thing about graffiti before I came here. But, coming into contact with it, I started to like it. I realized that this was a culture worth protecting.”

I still remember the first day I truly looked at graffiti. “...*Seriously?* You’ve never seen graffiti? No way, right?” she said to me, and I can still hear that reverberate in my ears.

“We will defeat Sugar. But, it’s not a victory brought about by strength...but by beauty.”

It was a pure coincidence that I came to this city. I didn't have anything to do here in particular. I just ran away from my troubles and happened to stumble into this town. Until she taught me about graffiti, I didn't know a thing. But now that I've learned one fact, it was like an unstoppable slope. The random drawings on the wall... turned into a message. The walls of the town changed into blank canvases. And I...met so many artists. Aeon, JT, Peni, Lara, Gabriel... I even managed to face Nelina. And...I took Boudicia's hand. The ones who taught me to properly face my problems...as well as myself...were this town and its writers.

"There's bound to be many people in this town who don't understand graffiti. And I want to tell those people...that the possibilities of graffiti are limitless...as well as its beauty."

This town has that sort of power.

"Because this beauty...brought me to today."

Silence returned to the Bearpit. JF was the first one to move, as he approached me with a scary face. However, when he arrived in front of me, he grinned and placed his hand on my shoulder.

"Well said! And if you're that adamant about it, then we can't be crying on the floor like this! Ain't that right, everyone?!"

The other members of **Queen Bear's Revenge** raised their voices. I've heard this sound many times before. Whenever Lara gave out orders, they would cheer the same way. I knew that it wasn't because of what I said. It's because the courage burning inside of them...was started because of Captain Lara, who loved Bristol more than anybody else standing there. And even if she's not here...her **Queen Bear's Revenge** hasn't disappeared.

"But, Yoshi...You get it, right? If we don't stop Yoshi, this fighting won't end. And for that..." JF said with a grave expression.

I knew what he was trying to say. Filling the center of Bristol with graffiti is just a *defensive* operation. If we don't have a strong enough offense to pull Sugar away from here, then this *invasion* will never end.

“Yeah, I know. I’ll handle it.”

The one to answer in my stead was Boudicia. The light had returned to her eyes.

“Ghost...will you be okay?”

“No idea. But, I gotta do something. I can’t be the only one just standing around.”

The crew in the Bearpit gathered and began chanting the name Ghost. Some tapped her on the back, others cheered for her. Our eyes met as she stood in the center of attention, and I smiled. She talked with the people from the crew, as she bashfully fixed her cap. I watched this when someone tapped me on the shoulder.

“Ah, Gabriel-san.”

He stood next to me, watching Boudicia and the crew, as he spoke up.

“Yoshi, you asked the right question. That’s why you arrived at the correct answer. No matter what the result may be, *isn’t it?*”

“Thank you...Though nothing has been resolved, I guess.”

Gabriel’s voice was as calm as always, but I felt something deeper within. And it felt like he was trying to figure that out, as he stared at me.

“Is there something on my face?”

“Do you remember what I told you before?”

Of course, there was only one thing that came to my mind.

“That I have no talent in music?”

“Did I really phrase it that way, I wonder. No, I said that you have a talent other than music.”

“Oh, really?”

I must have looked utterly confused because Gabriel started laughing.

“I think I just saw a piece of that.”

“What exactly do you mean by that...?”

He must have expected my half-baked question, as he immediately continued.

“You’ve got an eye for this.”

“An eye...for this?”

“That’s right. If you want to create something new, you first have to walk through the darkness. Isn’t that right?”

“Yes...”

I was painfully aware of that. Because I personally feel like I have been walking through the dark to look for that radiating something to guide my way. I am always lost, no matter what I do. Nothing I desperately want to do, no talent to really surprise people. There is no burning person inside my flame. That’s why I probably came here. To look for that passion that will guide me. That turned out to be Nelina, Gabriel...and Boudicia.

“You have the eye for talents within people that they themselves have not found. You’re like a *snake* that scans the animals in its sight with infrared rays.”

“That...does not sound like a compliment in the slightest,” I showed a wry smile.

However, Gabriel seemed genuine about this.

“It was the same back then...You felt the passion of the audience...of myself, and even of Nelina. That’s why you managed to play like that. It’s not like your performance was what stood out the most, but because you took that first step, everything after it could shine even brother. *Am I clear?*”

I nodded.

“The ability to understand the true nature...It is something different from the raw skill that gives birth to something beautiful...But it is an ability nonetheless.”

Now that he mentioned it, I connected a few dots. To me, it was weird that nobody believed Nelina and just badmouthed her. She was such a wonderful singer, and so gifted, too, yet she was shunned. I didn't understand why that was the case. Gabriel's talent was already accepted by everyone. However, everybody was a bit confused that he would make rock music. Yet, I didn't question it once, just playing the guitar as he wanted me to. And, what about Boudicia? If I really have that kind of talent...then what is it that I can do?

“Hey, Yoshi. You got a moment? I have something to ask of you.”

JF interrupted my thoughts. His expression had softened up a lot compared to before.

“Yes?”

“You know about the blog the Captain would always write on, right?”

“Yes.”

“I'd like you to write on there.”

For a moment, I doubted my ears. And then I replayed what had just happened. He wants me to write something...That, I did grasp, but...

“Me? But, I couldn't...”

“It'll be fine, I'll make sure to check your English.”

“Not you too, Gabriel-san! I'm an outsider, so...”

Another unexpected participant pushed my back, leaving me baffled. I can't possibly carry this responsibility. And yet, JF continued.

“We're not too good with writing texts and all that. Though we reap what we sowed because we just left it all to the Captain.” JF laughed and continued. “The folks from **Queen Bear's Revenge** agree with that.”

I looked around, seeing the other writers nod.

“I agree with them,” Boudicia said.

“Boo-san...”

“This is something only you can do.”

Her golden hair swayed with the summer breeze. Her mouth moved faintly, but the words coming from that reached my ears. It's something only I can do. I never would have expected I would find myself in such a situation, not to mention here in Bristol. But seeing her smile, and the expectations of the crew, I was too weak to fight back and gave in.

*

I'd like to preface this by stating that the person writing this blog post is not the usual Captain Lara. In fact, I haven't even lived here in Bristol for very long. However, I am writing this for a specific reason. Captain Lara has ended up hurt. She was hospitalized, and can't upload a new blog post. In fact, a majority of the crew suffered injuries. Surely, you must realize that something is going on in this town. The news says that it's a turf war between graffiti crews. However, that is only half the truth and half a lie.

The whole truth is that Bristol is being invaded. Graffiti writers...No, a gang from London has come here to spread their territory, putting up graffiti everywhere. That is why the whole town is full of it, causing public safety to deteriorate. The writers of Bristol have tried to fight back against this invasion but to no avail. Captain Lara was even attacked by the gang and was severely injured.

This situation is not the fault of the citizens. However, the blame cannot be pinned on the writers of Bristol, either. And yet, our one way to defend against this invasion is to rely on graffiti. That's why we—the writers of Bristol—have decided to fight back. I know that a lot of citizens must be getting sick and tired of the graffiti. However, if the writers of Bristol don't act now,

the city will be filled with more and more grotesque graffiti. This, in return, will turn the city into the gang's turf, allowing drugs and prostitution to sicker into the system. And then, this beautiful scenery of art will forever be lost. This is not a joke. Many other cities have fallen victim to the gang.

The truth of the matter is I haven't lived here very long. It's not even been a year since I moved to Bristol. However, I met graffiti and learned about this city's wonderful culture. It gripped me so much that I am writing this text to all of you citizens right now. We will write graffiti. However, it won't just be any regular graffiti. We will write graffiti that will elevate the feelings of all the residents here in graffiti. So beautiful that nobody can overwrite it. So that no more grotesque graffiti can fill our streets. And...to protect this town.

For that, we ask you to lend us your walls. The people who are willing to support us, please write [We Are Bristol] on them. We promise to overwrite your message with artistic graffiti that will bring no shame to this town. And that we won't write on any other walls than those that are given to us.

Please, let us protect this city together. We hope for your support.

Advertisement

Chapter 4: “She’s Not There”

I prayed that the change in the city wasn’t just something my imagination brewed up. The blog entry I wrote spread like wildfire. Slowly but surely, we began to see more and more writings on the walls of Bristol, stating [We are Bristol], which made the writers of **Queen Bear’s Revenge** busy filling those with their graffiti. But not only did they put their graffiti everywhere, but they also aimed to create graffiti that the citizens could accept. Thus, each graffiti was made with love and affection like it would be their last.

In return, many of the writers commented. They said they never even considered who owned the walls they wrote on. But seeing the slogan [We are Bristol], they first understood that someone stood beyond the wall. And, I think the same could be said for the citizens. The owners of the walls uploaded pictures of the graffiti online, and some even had the writer and owner’s shoulder to shoulder as they took a selfie together. To them, graffiti could not have been some ordinary drawings on the wall. Unlike me, who had to learn it all. But through the invasion from London, the conception that Bristol and graffiti were one grew even stronger.

At first, **Queen Bear’s Revenge** only worked near the Bearpit, but their radius continued to grow. And during that time, Sugar and the gang didn’t go on the attack. **Sweet Tooth** resorting to aggressive methods to spread their turf was the worst-case scenario. However, there were no signs of that as of right now. I wanted to believe that this was thanks to the work of **Queen Bear’s Revenge** and the citizens, but it was most likely just because they were watching how the police would act.

The graffiti created by **Sweet Tooth** was slowly moving north from the Bristol Temple Meads station to the south, whereas the **Queen Bear’s Revenge**’s graffiti moved toward that from the north. And the collision point of those two happened to be the Bristol shopping

quarter. It's Bristol's biggest shopping area that harbored several stores, as well as the shopping mall. And since the area was filled with security cameras, as well as guards, it was hard to write graffiti there. Soon enough, it ended up as the frontlines of this invasion.

Everyone knew that this city was in the middle of being invaded. The citizens supported the graffiti writers of Bristol, but they also feared the use of explosives or violent attacks. As a result of that, the atmosphere in the city grew dark, as fewer and fewer people stepped out onto the streets. My colleagues at university all voiced their worries, too, so I couldn't tell them I was involved in this whole mess. But, I knew that we had to finish this situation as quickly as possible. However, there was one fact that we had to accept no matter what...Namely, that Sugar was a talented artist.

Just like a musician who aims to move the hearts of the people at a live concert, or a painter creating a work for the ages, an artist needs experience. And he was using this war to teach the city fear and terror. He used the city as a canvas...Or a wall in this case, as he told all the citizens, and this ability had to be respected. But even so, we had to beat Sugar. It wasn't related to skill, either. Even if we created graffiti better than his, he will hardly change his mind about this. Maybe he'll even destroy it through extreme measures. We can't make him give up on Bristol with just that. That's why we, as artists, have to overwrite Sugar.

His skill, his beliefs, his determination, everything. For that, Boudicia discussed how we could possibly beat him. One day we met at a cafe. The other day, we headed to the Bearpit. One day we met up at a random wall, and on another, we moved to my room. However, we never managed to reach some kind of conclusion. That being said, we also made some progress, at least. What's important for graffiti is the context. Even if Boudicia ended up drawing highly-skilled graffiti, there was no point if it ended just with that. We have to make sure that Sugar admits defeat.

And for that, we had to find one of his graffiti to overwrite it. Boudicia and I agreed on that, too. The problem now was that Sugar hadn't been writing since then. We walked around town, asking the people from **Queen Bear's Revenge** to contact us if they found the graffiti. And yet, Sugar didn't show himself. I figured out exactly

what this would mean. Sugar said he was looking for someone. Maybe he managed to find that person.

“We really can’t find any of Sugar’s graffiti.”

“Yeah...”

We walked alongside the river. Since we searched through the area south of Bristol Bridge, we had no other option but to head west. We crossed the street at St Mary Redcliffe, then went across the Redcliffe Bascule Bridge, and yet we couldn’t find any graffiti from **Sweet Tooth**. The area around here was generally used as a storage and warehouse area since Bristol had begun to grow as a port city. Even now, we could see large cranes standing around, and using the various storehouses, the restaurants were now competing against each other.

In the distance, we could see a house in a rectangular shape, splattered with colors. It was actually one of the statues here in Bristol, called a Victorian Terrace House, an old building made of brick. Nobody knows who first colored it in such a bright color, but that was also very much like Bristol.

“I wonder what he’s up to.” Boudicia lowered her head, kicking along the stone pavement.

He did seem like he could be quite stubborn, and yet he often operated solely based on his own convenience and feelings. It was practically impossible to try and find out where exactly he would appear next. Once we crossed the Princess Street Bridge, she sat down on a random bench, resting her cheek on one hand as she crossed her legs. I sat down next to her. And only then did I realize how exhausted I was after all the walking.

Time had progressed to evening, as the sky was colored in a light blue and orange mix, reflected in the River Avon. For a while, Boudicia just stared at the water’s surface, only to finally mutter without confidence.

“Can I...win, I wonder?”

“...You’re not referring to skill, right?”

She nodded and then rubbed her eyes with her left hand.

“Right now, I can draw stuff on a similar level as before. It’s not that my technique isn’t good enough to win.”

She’s not wrong. At this stage, it’d be fair to say she’s reached a level that was close to perfection when it came to skill. Everything I’ve known from before she lost her right arm was the lion graffiti. However, If you look at the raw skill she possessed, she could create something far more complicated than that lion, even with her left hand. However, that wasn’t enough in order for her to win.

I’ve been thinking about it this whole time. What I could do in order to give her strength...And if I have the skill to find that burning flame shimmering in the darkness...then I want to give her the answer she needs. Just like she guided me all this time.

“Why did you decide to write graffiti even now, Boo-san?”

“Dunno,” she responded bluntly. “I can’t be like Lara. I do like Bristol, but I can’t just write for the sake of it. It doesn’t feel like...I can win against Sugar like that.”

A breeze passed us from the river, which shook her golden eyelashes. She blinked a few times as if to protect her eyes from the wind.

“I’m *selfish*, right? Maybe I really can only write for my own sake.”

“That’s not the case.”

“But, I just don’t get it...What do I want myself to draw?” Boudicia moved her heavy body toward the river, leaning against the fence.

I slowly stood next to her. Her expression looked lost, as she watched the water move. I felt worried that she might get carried away by the breeze, only to not be seen again.

“...At first, I couldn’t draw as I wanted, so drawing itself was just fun. And then, I saw Aeon with his crazy strokes, and Sugar was extremely good, too. I wanted to be like them. And improving was

hella fun. I could overwrite all the writers I struggled against. But then, when I lost my arm, I thought of quitting...Yet, I ran into you..." Boudicia looked at me, as her blue eyes captured me.

And then, she closed her eyes as if she realized something.

"Maybe...I don't want to write anymore."

For a moment, I struggled to understand what she just said. She doesn't want to...write anymore?

"Boo-san, what are you..."

"I've been thinking about it this entire time. What Sugar said, y'know. That everything needs to end. And that we should accept that. He's right. Both Aeon and Peni almost got killed. We don't even know if Lara will be able to ever write again. Everyone's in tatters." Boudicia kept looking down and spoke as if the dam had broken. "Nobody will protect us. The city council, the police...No allies to be found. As long as we're writing graffiti, will things always be like this? Get punched, get kicked, bleed, and feel terror...Why do we still have to write despite that? What happens after we make Sugar give up and leave? And..."

She didn't continue. Surely, that thought wasn't just born right now. This doubt inside of her...Maybe it was something she held this entire time but decided to look away from it. Like a stone biting into the roots of a tall tree. And now, Boudicia is trying to face that. And of course, I knew what result would come from that.

"I just wanna quit it all."

She made an expression I had never seen before. Even when she laughed, when she was stuck, when she was hurt, she always moved forward. Always looked ahead. When she was lost, she looked up and kept on running. But right now, the girl in front of me wasn't the Ghost of Bristol who caused a miracle before. Instead, it was just an anxious girl who was scared of being hurt.



“Boo-san, we’re only getting started. We shouldn’t give up. It’s fine to not know where to go at times. For now, we have to focus on making Sugar give up and then...”

I wasn’t throwing empty words at her. This was all that I felt deep inside my heart. And yet, all the words I said were empty, fragile like bubbles that would break at the smallest touch.

“Stop saying all this irresponsible nonsense!”

“I’m not trying to be irresponsible. I just...”

I just want to be her strength. I was just looking for something that I could do. Because that’s as much as I can do.

“Then don’t.”

“Don’t what?”

“Don’t go back to Japan.”

“That’s...”

“Stay in Bristol. Let’s...always stay together!”

It felt like someone had punched me in the head.

“...I knew that you were this type of guy. You’ll be gone, soon enough. You’ll go back to Japan and then play in your band with Nelina. It’s been decided that this is the life you’ll live. You decided that. And I’m no part of that. You’ll forget about me, as well as Bristol as a whole.”

“I will never forget you!”

“Then why aren’t you telling me anything?!”

Ah, I see. It’s not that she never said anything. She was thinking about it. And she waited for me...this whole time.

“It’s all gonna end. He’s right. And that’s why I can’t...!”

I finally understood the reason we can’t beat Sugar. It’s because he is right. People die, and everything will eventually. Everyone should be aware of that. And how could we call him wrong?

“You’re right.”

I felt like a heavy shower fell on my heart. This grew stronger as I was drenched and eventually washed away by the tidal wave.

"I'm a *stranger*. A *passer-by*. I can't stay in Bristol forever. I've known that from the very start."

"Yoshi, I..."

Boudicia looked at me like she'd realized her mistake. I knew I could pull back now. But, the water had begun to form a river, washing it all away.

"I'm not a citizen here in Bristol. I'm not a graffiti writer, either. I'm a Japanese student who came here to study abroad. I just looked away from my own problems and ran away. And since it felt comfortable here, I was under some spell that made me not see right."

It felt like the world around me was breaking apart. Why...Why can I never grasp that small glimmer of hope? Nothing continues forever, so I just wanted to treasure this moment given to me. But just as Boudicia said, I was being irresponsible. And now that I had realized that, there was only one conclusion to draw.

"Boo-san, I want to save you. But, I can't do anything. I have nothing. No answer, or even a question. I can't do anything for you."

She didn't say a word. I couldn't read any emotion from her expression. Or, it was probably because I couldn't accept whatever feelings were stirring up deep inside of her. She just waited for the end to arrive.

"I always hesitated if I should tell you. The reason why you can't beat Sugar...why you don't want to write."

In my heart, I was screaming. Please, stop. Don't say another word. Don't end it all right here. However, I couldn't stop myself any longer. I took a deep breath, moving my lips and everything inside my mouth to create these words that cut through the silence.

"Right now, Boo-san...You have no soul."

*

Boudicia disappeared. After I said those words, she stood up and ran away. Unable to chase after her, I just stood still like a rooted tree. I

don't even remember how I got home. All I knew was...that it was all over now. I was laying in my bed in my dorm, but inside my heart, I already felt like I had gotten home to Japan. Having lingering attachment, or not wanting to go home...What I felt was a bit different from that. Getting to know Boudicia, learning about graffiti, discovering all these things...and then working for the sake of this city...and now, I said my goodbyes to Boudicia.

I truly felt like I had finished everything there was for me to do here. It's not that I don't want to watch the end of all this fighting. But, there was nothing I could do. The rest simply relied on Boudicia. Sure, I have regrets. I keep thinking about why things had to end this way. But in the end...it's all I could do. The moment I came to Bristol, my fate was sealed. In fact, meeting her was an irregular event. I grabbed the 94 spray can I had on my desk. Even a year after living here, I still don't know how to properly throw this away. But... this was all the connection I have with Bristol.

I sighed and moved over to place the spray can on the desk when I saw something had fallen to the ground right ahead of me. It was a sticker. Since Boudicia showed me this before, I immediately understood what it was. Since writing a tag right then and there on a wall can be pretty dangerous, you can put your graffiti on a sticker like this to place them wherever. And it was even made with material that made it harder to pull off. However, written on this sticker wasn't a tag or any graffiti, but a regular sentence—*Light at the end of the tunnel*.

I didn't know what meaning this sticker held, but I stuffed it into my pocket nonetheless. Instead, a bad premonition crept down my spine. I immediately ran out of my dorm. It felt like it might start raining soon, but I didn't have the composure to worry about that. Despite the iffy weather, the people in the Bearpit were cheerful. You could tell they were filled with hope, as they wrote their graffiti. Of course, living with the hope that, while they do this, Boudicia will deal with Sugar for them. And...it's the hope I actively crushed with my actions.

I looked around the Bearpit to look for her when someone tapped me on the shoulder. Turning around, there stood JF. Seeing his energetic face, I just felt stronger guilt weighing down on me.

“Yo, Yoshi. Thanks to you, the graffiti is coming along great. We’ve got so many more supporters with the citizens. Now it’s up for the Ghost to...”

“I’m sorry, JF-san. Have you seen Boo-san?”

“No...? What’s up.”

“I can’t find her. And it’s all my fault.”

“Hey, hey, relax. What’s gotten into you?”

I seemingly didn’t realize how flustered and panicked I was. I took a deep breath to calm myself down.

“...Sorry, I was just panicking.”

“*No worries*. So, what’s up?”

“I can’t get in contact with Boo-san.”

Hearing my words, JF’s expression grew distorted.

“Hold on, that’s pretty bad, no? You don’t think they got their hands on the Ghost...”

“Um...I don’t think that’s the case. It’s just...some stuff happened...”

I blabbered over my own words, unsure how to explain myself to JF.

“If you can’t get in contact with her, then how’re you gonna know if she’s fine?!”

JF’s words made me gasp. Because of what happened yesterday, I assumed that it was my fault, but I can’t deny the possibility that Sugar may have found her.

“JF-san, there’s no tunnel in Bristol, right?”

“A tunnel?” JF was bewildered and returned the question.

“Yes, it might be related to where Boo-san went.”

“A tunnel...Well, Redcliffe is more like a cave. There is a tunnel below Temple Meads station, but...”

“Really?!”

“Let me finish first. That area’s not open to the public, and you can’t get inside there. Also, why do you think a tunnel’s related to the Ghost’s location?”

I took out the sticker and showed it to JF.

“The heck’s that?” He accepted this and gave it a closer look. “Well, the light beyond the tunnel is a popular saying. In a way, it refers to hope.”

“Hope...”

I envisioned a long tunnel with a bright light waiting at the end.

“Did the Ghost write this?”

“I’m not sure, but it was inside my room.”

“Hm...So she might have left this behind for you. I’m guessing the gang didn’t find her then. But that leaves the question of...”

“Where she went, you mean?”

“Yeah. Maybe...But, then again...”

JF seemed like he had an idea, but was unsure if he should say it.

“Please, JF-san. Tell me.”

I kept on pressing further. I needed any kind of hint right now. After all, Boudicia might be in danger right now.”

“I’ve got no proof or anything, so...”

“That’s good enough.”

“...There’s a famous tunnel that all of us writers know about.”

JF returned the sticker, which I accepted and put back into my pocket.

“A famous tunnel?”

“Yeah...It’s the Banksy Tunnel.”

I swallowed my breath. Banksy—The world-renowned artist who found his origin in Bristol. And this was the first time I had heard of a tunnel being named after him.

“It’s one of the few places where you’re legally allowed to write graffiti. I went there once, and the entire place is full of graffiti.”

Something didn’t sit right with me.

“But, wait. You said that the tunnel in Bristol was off-limits.”

“That’s right. That’s the problem.”

“What do you mean?”

“The Banksy Tunnel isn’t in Bristol.”

The wind blew, moving from west to east.

“It’s in London.”

*

Of course, I had no proof that Boudicia really headed to this Banksy Tunnel in London. However, I was sure that finding a sticker like that in my room at a time like this must have some sort of meaning. If Boudicia really went to head for London, it must have happened early this morning. If I headed there right now, I might just be able to run into her. Needless to say, I might just be wasting my time with this, but I could not bring myself to sit still and wait. There are several methods to reach London from Bristol. The most prominent one would be to take the train at Temple Meads station. However, with **Sweet Tooth**’s graffiti everywhere, I would be walking right into hostile territory. For that, I opted to choose the long-distance bus.

I quickly checked the times on my phone and bought a ticket. Luckily, I found one that departed immediately. The Bristol Bus and Coach station was right to the west of Bristol. I looked for the bus in question and showed the driver my reservation. He gave it a dubious look, but then signaled me to come inside. The inside of the bus wasn't too different from the long-distance ones I was used to in Japan. Thankfully, not many people headed for London on a regular weekday, allowing me to easily find a seat. I chose one in the back, far behind two women who were excited about the upcoming trip.

The seat gave in to my weight, allowing me to sink deep into it as it let out a faint creak. Immediately after, the bus driver got on the bus, with the doors closing. Then, I heard the sound of the engine revving up, as the bus started moving. Checking the time, it would take roughly three hours from here to Victoria station in London. I didn't like that I had to wait all the time, but walking around the bus in anxiety wouldn't let it arrive any quicker. And when I was on the bus, all I could do was wait.

I sighed. Lately, I've just been running around. And while my feelings were telling me things to speed up, my body told me to rest. Even now, the writers of Bristol were fighting against the invasion from London. Lara and Peni are hospitalized, and JF was giving orders to the writers in the Bearpit. But...what was Boudicia doing right now? I imagined her getting hurt by Sugar but quickly shook my head. It was like the air inside the bus was different, like I had entered a different world, making the passage of time feel slower.

Then, I remembered the sensation of her head resting on my lap when we watched that movie. If I had her by my side right now, I would probably be the happiest person in the whole world. But alas, I closed my eyes. Why did she go to London? Or, is she even in London right now? If she really went there alone, it must be because of what I said to her. That she has no soul. Of course, I had faintly felt this the whole time. However, there is always a time and place.

Something wasn't right with me back then. I was just so shocked and bewildered that I didn't know what I was saying...Well, excuses like that are pointless. But...if she really is at the Banksy Tunnel in London...What should I say to her? She said that she didn't want to write anymore. So...should I respect those feelings? And...her words

still were stuck inside my heart like a knife—Telling me to stay in Bristol. To stay with her. How should I respond to that? I wanted to think about it, but it felt like the inside of my mind was full of fog, not allowing me to proceed. On the contrary, it brought me to a standstill. Those three hours feel incredibly long...but far too short to find an answer to all of my problems.

I took out my headphones and connected them to my smartphone via Bluetooth, then started playing music. Right as I leaned against the seat, my phone vibrated. For a moment, I was filled with hope that it could be Boudicia, so I quickly looked at the phone screen, but it was a different name—Nelina. I quickly opened the message. And there, I saw two simple words.

‘You alive?’

I didn’t know why, but I burst out laughing. To think she would check up on me at a time like this.

‘Somewhat.’

I returned this one-word response when suddenly Nelina called me. I almost dropped my phone out of shock but managed to catch it at the last second. Talking with her always makes me feel nervous, so I took a deep breath and then accepted the call.

“Ah, Yoshi. Why aren’t you contacting Nelina? Normally, you should ask if she’s doing okay and if she got back home to Japan safely. Your lack of contact made Nelina worry if you died.”

I couldn’t help but flash a wry smile as she kept on rambling. Even if we haven’t talked in a while, it’s like she was never gone once.

“I shouldn’t have answered. I’ll hang up now.”

“Not my problem...But, something happened, right?”

“Huh? Why would you think that?”

“You’re so easy to read when it comes to that. You’re playing tough. But you can’t survive in this harsh world all by yourself.”

I cursed myself for not hanging up. How come she can always see right through my feelings?

“Nelina thought of contacting you because of the explosion she heard about in the news...but if there was nothing going on, you would just say something. So now, Nelina’s using this moment to snuggle up inside your heart and gain bonus points.”

“Should you really be saying that to the person in question?”

“Bleh, it’s you we’re talking about.”

Despite her poking fun at me, I could also feel my heart being grasped. We’ve been apart for a while now, and we rarely even talked during this whole time, and yet she understood me better than I did. I looked around inside the bus. The people ahead of me were still talking as much as before, and nobody was around me. Granted, it was pretty normal to see people talking inside the buses here in the UK, but it must be my Japanese blood that tells me to be cautious so that I don’t bother other people.

“I’m sorry, Nelina-san. I have a favor to ask of you.”

“Oh, what’s up? A favor from none other than Yoshi? What a rarity. You know, Nelina is excited to meet you again, so she might listen to whatever request you have. However, it can’t be anything that people can see, because Nelina still belongs to everyone...”

“I fought with Boo-san.”

Nelina went silent. After a brief moment, I could hear a loud sigh coming from all the way from Japan.

“Now listen up. If you stood in front of me right now, I would have slapped you for that. Do you know how I feel? I’m just gonna hang up, bye-bye.”

“Wait, please, that’s not it.”

“That’s exactly it, right? I was worried so much, can’t even help you, and yet now I feel like blowing up that stray cat myself. I’ll make sure to send her a letter bomb straight from Nelina to hell. Don’t joke

with me, damn it.”

“Nelina-san, did you ever feel like not singing any more?”

Another long silence followed.

“Hm. I see how it is.”

More silence.

“...I do.”

“Why was that?”

“It happened before we met. I thought I would be able to get whatever I wanted. But, nobody listened to me. It made me wonder why I was even singing. And, I couldn’t speak for a while.”

She spoke with an indifferent tone but imagining how that must have felt sent shivers down my spine. And at the same time, it surprised me. Minding the smaller things, Nelian is tough. She does not choose the methods necessary to accomplish her goal. So hearing that she couldn’t sing was such a shocking revelation to me.

“So, what happened?”

“Now, let’s do a Nelina Quiz. What did the clever and adorable Nelina-chan do after that?! You have five seconds!”

“Um, you consulted someone?”

“Boohoo, wrong! The correct answer is: She went to eat yakiniku, punched the sandbag at the gym a few times, went to take a bath, and then slept!”

“And that resolved everything...?”

“Nope. But it allowed me to think more clearly. And then I started thinking about what my goal is and writing down why my singing is necessary. And then, I realized that I didn’t have time to be depressed. In fact, it allowed me to get better. It took me twelve hours to recover. Which is pretty long, I guess.”

I had no words to return to that. She has a talent. However, this talent went far beyond being a good singer or having sense. It's the conviction to make whatever she wishes come true. You could call it her determination. In the end, singing is just a means to get what she wants. So then, what about me? Or, what about Boudicia? What's our goal, and what methods do we have available?

"And? Did that help?"

She said, not sounding serious at all. As I thought, she saw right through it all. I smiled and shook my head, despite knowing she couldn't see it.

"Not at all. Your case is just too special, Nelina-san."

"Whaaaat? I jumped over my shame to tell you an embarrassing story of mine and this is how you thank me?"

"I don't think it's that embarrassing of a story if you overcome it that quickly. It's more like a heroic tale."

Nobody would be able to copy her. Neither I nor Boudicia. But...

"It helped me realize. Only Boo-san can find the answer to her question."

The bus hopped up a moment as it drove over a bump.

"I should have never considered myself important enough to try and find an answer for her."

"...Listen."

"What?"

Nelina spoke with a tone more serious than before.

"Leaving aside her answer...You also have to find your own answer, too, Yoshi. You know that?"

"Of course...or so I think, at least."

Compared to Nelina, I'm not as quick on the uptake. I only understood what she meant by listening to her following words.

"You're coming back home, right?"

I couldn't answer. Until a moment ago, it felt like I had nothing else to do in Bristol. And surely, I would have gone back to Japan despite having regrets. But now, I wasn't sure anymore. Even so, I had to make up my mind. If not, I won't be able to move on. The same goes for Boudicia, too. And Nelina managed to read through me even with that silence.

"Give that stray cat my regards."

I knew she smiled even if I couldn't tell.

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Arriving in London at the Victoria Coach Station, it was raining outside. Usually, London is known for its bad and rainy weather, but coming to the UK, I realized that it actually wasn't so bad. The city of smoke was born from the amount of smog in the town, but comparing this to Tokyo, then it definitely rained less. That being said, the stuffy atmosphere in London definitely had a melancholic feeling. I walked inside Victoria station, remembering when I had first arrived in the UK. One year ago, I took the plane from Narita Airport to Heathrow Airport, then stayed in London for a night. Finally, I used the Great Western Railway to Bristol. I didn't stay in London long, but I could look around for a bit.

I still remember feeling two distinct impressions about London. First, it is an old city. Most of the buildings were built of brick or stone, and at almost every corner, you would find historical locations like a palace, a museum, a theater, and other sights. And this elevated it to one of the few cities with worldwide historical value. Granted, Bristol had similar historical buildings, but it couldn't compare to London.

And at the same time, London was a new city. Many buildings were made of glass and steel, architecturally updated to modern times, as you could see new-type bikes and cars driving around. The same could be said about the clothes the people passing me wore. And with

this many people living here, you'd see a wide arrangement of restaurants, with billboards of foreign languages as far as you could see.

These two impressions created the mosaic that was London the city. And my initial impression has not changed compared to now. However, back then, it really felt like I had set foot in a completely foreign country. Sure, I still feel like I'm far away from my home. However, the home in my mind was Bristol. Stepping out of Victoria station, I used my oyster card to take the underground railroad. I passed through the ticket gate made with blunt steel, stepping onto the cart colored in red, blue, and white. At Green Park, I changed to the Jubilee Line, continued to Stratford and Westminster, and finally got off at Waterloo station.

Banksy Tunnel supposedly was close to Waterloo Station. I carefully observed my surroundings and then made my way there. The scenery hasn't changed since the last time I was here, but one place caught my attention. It was a small parking area where a few cars had parked. There, I could see graffiti. The building of the wall deeper inside the parking lot was buried with graffiti like birds had come to get fed. Seeing that, I was sure of it. After a bit more walking, I found the tunnel. However, it wasn't anything much like a tunnel, and more like a passage beneath an elevated street. What really stood out the most was the inside, filled to the brim with graffiti. I tried to remain calm as I snuck alongside the tunnel entrance, hearing a voice from the inside.

"Hey there, Boo-chan. It's been a while."

It was Sugar.

"You came to meet me, right?"

"You're alone today, huh?"

And the other voice I heard...undoubtedly belonged to Boudicia. I kept hiding and tried to calm my heart which was close to jumping out from my chest. I felt relief that I finally managed to find her, while also terror that she was facing Sugar of all people.

“Hm? You mean Liquorice-chan? Ah, are you jealous? No worries. She’s probably looking for me in Bristol right about now. I came here without telling her, after all.”

“Sugar...Why did you call me here? Not to mention...to this place.”

He called for her. That means she didn’t leave Bristol out of her own desire.

“Well, I’m surprised you came. If I had the crew with me, you’d be locked up and I could take my time asking you how it felt to die.”

“I came because I wanted to talk to you.”

“Huh, I wonder about that.” Sugar’s laughter filled the tunnel, even reaching my ears.

He probably didn’t expect I’d be listening to this. That being said, I wasn’t particularly angry at him. It’s because the tone of his voice sounded different from usual...And that definitely wasn’t because of the tunnel’s echo, I bet.

“Well, let’s just get to writing. This is the Banksy Tunnel, the greatest legal wall here in London. Nobody will get angry at us. And it’ll be just us two, right?”

Boudicia didn’t respond. Instead, I heard the rattling of the spray can be shaken, followed by spraying sounds, as they continued their conversation.

“Let me get straight to it. Let’s live together in London, Boo-chan.”

“No thanks.”

“Hm...I figured you’d say that. But, if you agree, I’ll make the gang pull out of Bristol.”

“...What?”

“Why are you so surprised? I want us to write as we’ve done before.”

“And I’ve always been meaning to ask just what happened to you.

Why did you team up with a gang? What are you thinking, even? I have no idea anymore..."

The sound of spray temporarily stopped.

"You know...I want to write a masterpiece. Not just a full work that needs all my work. Instead, it has to be something *truly moving*." Sugar's cold voice filled the tunnel. "I thought I could do that. Until... you came."

"...Me?"

"That's right. You improved at incredible speed. You could pull off everything and all immediately."

"That's not true. I just copied you..."

"You weren't copying me. You made my style your own in the blink of an eye. I knew immediately you just passed me by. That's why I went to London...so that I wouldn't lose."

"I didn't know that! And Aeon didn't say a damn thing!"

"He said to not get you involved in my problems. And, that *everything comes to naught*. In the face of the passage of time, victory or defeat is such a minor thing to get hung up on. But if that's the case, then what even is the point of graffiti? I wanted to win. Against you...and myself. That's how graffiti was born, right?"

I remembered Boudicia's right hand. Unable to write properly, unable to win against anybody, she wanted to leave Bristol behind. In a way, it was similar to what Sugar did. And how did Aeon feel seeing both his students clash with a wall like that?

"Coming to London was the right choice. I wrote graffiti each and every single day. I met a lot of people, too. Writing, being overwritten, the same on repeat. And since I didn't have a place to stay, I just slept on the street. London was me, and I was London. Even if it wasn't always easy."

I stood up, lowered my body, and quietly entered the tunnel. I hid next to a large pillar, sitting down again. Thanks to that, I could

finally see them in the distance. They stood facing a wall, spraying their graffiti. Boudicia used her left hand, whereas Sugar relied on both of his. Seeing that, I returned back behind the shadow of the pillar. I knew that listening in on their conversation wasn't an admirable act, but I could not miss out on this conversation. I wanted to know what kind of person Sugar is. He wasn't just the enemy of Bristol any longer. He may be evil, but he holds artistic values like an artist. And by learning about him, I might learn more about Boudicia.

"But, someone decided to take me in."

Sugar's voice was as cheerful as always. However, that rotten tone lingering deep within that was nowhere to be found.

"She really liked the type of graffiti I created. She was the type of person to sell art at the gallery. She told me to write on a canvas. Said I shouldn't be living on the street. That I'm an artist who can convey their feelings to other people."

An artist who only knew the streets and a gallery worker who found him. What heartwarming scenery.

"She let me inside her home, and one single room was like my atelier. Said I could draw as much as I want, and I was really happy. I thought I could finally draw the masterpiece I always wanted."

There, Sugar's spray stopped.

"But...I can't draw anything."

Following that, so did Boudicia's.

"I slept under the roof. With her and on a fluffy bed. She fed me delicious food every day. She gave me all the material I needed. But when I sat facing the white canvas, I couldn't draw anything. I couldn't do anything, no matter how many days passed."

"...And what happened then?"

"One day, she was attacked."

FWUSH, a gust of wind blew through the tunnel. The air inside the

tunnel was suddenly reeking of something grotesque. And it felt like I was glued to the ground, unable to move.

“It was done by someone who couldn’t stand my guts. Probably because I acted like an artist. This kind of jealousy is what kills people. The streets of London work like that.”

“But...”

“I can still remember it now. Drenched in blood, lying on the ground like a used dust cloth...was her carcass.”

The backstreets of London only exist to give place for trash bins and graffiti. In a place where no help arrives. Being hit, stabbed, kicked, bleeding blood...and finally losing all light. Only because she helped a single writer. And just the thought of that was utterly revolting.

“I saw all that. I wrote about it.”

And yet, Sugar continued to speak with his usual tone.

“Right on the wall next to her dead body. It’s like my body was possessed. I never wrote something like that. It’s my own masterpiece that I can’t overwrite.”

Before I realized it, I covered my mouth with my hands. My body was shaking. Is something like that even possible? Can a human being really do that? Witnessing the death of someone you cherish...and writing graffiti next to their carcass? What if...it was Boudicia? Could I play the guitar while looking at her lifeless body? No, of course not. How could I?

“Starting with that, I finally found the message I had to convey...the soul that I lacked. I wanted to write more. And that’s when I met Liquorice-chan and teamed up with her gang. They allow me to write as much as I want. And I make their turf grow. Everyone’s happy.”

“Did you ever find out who did it?”

“Nope. I had nothing but enemies here, after all. That’s why I just gathered all the writers I could think of and beat them up. Surely, one of them must have been the person who did it, but at some

point...I stopped caring about her anyway.”

I doubted my ears. However, Sugar continued, still devoid of emotion.

“It’s a piece of work, you see. If I had gotten to live with her there for the rest of my life, I would have been happy. But then, I was hungry, so I wrote. She stopped me from writing graffiti.” Sugar spoke with the warmth of the rising sun. “But, now it’s different. I have to teach everyone. People can only become artists if they find themselves at death’s doorstep. Only then can they create something truly beautiful. That is the truth I must tell the world.”

“But even without that...I can write!”

“Really? Can you really say that while writing such empty graffiti?”

I faintly pushed my head out of the shadows. From this angle, I couldn’t see what Sugar wrote. However, Boudicia’s graffiti...was empty, after all.

“I understand how you feel. You don’t want to write anymore, right? It must be hard for you. It’s because you have no message. No reason to write any longer.”

“That’s not true! I...just...”

I watched her from the shadows. Sugar approached Boudicia and took her hand. She tried to pull it back, but he wouldn’t let go.

“Hey, Boo-chan. I was really sad when I heard you couldn’t write anymore...and I was really happy when I heard you returned. That’s why I snuck out from London to take a look at yours...But, I was disappointed. Honestly, I don’t care about this whole turf nonsense. I just want you to write a true masterpiece. But, you’re too fulfilled for that. That’s why I came to look for whoever is getting in your way.”

“Wait, are you...”

“At first, I thought it was Aeon-sensei. But, that wasn’t it. Then I thought it was that crew, so I went to hunt that Captain and sunk her ship. Though that other guy protecting her was an unfortunate

oversight. I even left the spray can there just for you, yet you still wouldn't write."

"...!"

"You know, don't you? That one day, everything will end. You will. Graffiti will. Bristol will. London will. Love will. Everything will. People can't live righteously if they don't look death in the eye. Everything is headed toward an end. Even this very moment. And the moment you understand that, you can write a masterpiece. And if you don't understand that, then I'm in trouble here," Sugar spoke with an eerie but gentle tone. "Now, tell me. Who is the person who made you whole?"

Silence filled the tunnel. It felt like time came to a halt. The person who made her whole...Could that possibly...refer to me? Would it be arrogant to assume that? Because...no matter how happy that would make me, it would only bring her pain. Because of her, I could play the guitar again. Because she's here, I haven't returned to Japan. But if she enjoyed the time we spent together as much as I did...then maybe I should have set her free much sooner. The reason she can't write is that I've been staying by her side this whole time. How...irresponsible I was.

"Sugar, I get what you're trying to tell me." Boudicia accepted this. "When I was by myself, I wrote my best works. It felt like I could do everything I wanted. And yet, right now, I'm always feeling puffy, up in the air, like my *feet are off the ground*."

Her voice was quivering, but even so...I could clearly pick up what she tried to say.

"...But even so, the reason I could draw again like this...is because Yoshi was with me."

I remembered what she was like when she wanted to quit graffiti. How she despaired, being unable to write what she did before. I've watched her this whole year...by her side, too.

"He told me to only write for my sake. That it was fine if I didn't accomplish anything. That's why I could write again. I became free.

And before I realized...I couldn't write if he wasn't with me."

Like I took a step forward for her sake when I couldn't play the guitar again...She could make progress because I was with her. And if that was really true...

"But...He's gonna go back to Japan. Because he has people waiting for him there. The reason I can't write isn't that he's with me...It's because he'll leave me soon. And that makes me feel sad...and it hurts so much...that I just don't know what to do!"

It felt like my whole world was turned upside down. It's not because I'm with her...But because I'll be gone soon. I didn't even think about that. I always thought that...it would have been better if I wasn't around. Be it the band, this city...and even Boudicia. I assumed that I was the one asking others. But I just ran away, simply accepting that...Like I've done all this time. And if so, then I can't let things end here. If it's not too late...then I want to inherit it all. These limited days we have, her feelings...and the responsibility that comes with it.

"...So she says. You're listening, right?"

I wasn't too surprised. I had a feeling this was the case. Because it felt like Sugar was talking to me at some point, and not Boudicia.

"Huh? Yoshi? Why are you here?!"

When I revealed myself, Boudicia's eyes shot wide open.

"That's my line, Boo-san."

"Did you...hear all of that?"

"I'm sorry." I apologized and admitted it.

"But...I didn't...think you were listening..."

Unlike Boudicia, Sugar wasn't surprised in the slightest.

"Finally decided to show yourself, huh?"

"Since when have you known?"

“From the very start. You have to be sensitive to a person’s presence, or you can’t write in London. I’m a bit *disappointed* that you’d actually eavesdrop like that. However...” Sugar gazed at me. “... Yeah. I can see it now. It’s you. You’re the reason. If I mess you up here, then Boo-chan will return to who she truly is. And it will open the path to her *true masterpiece*.”

And then, he laughed. It was almost like the corners of his mouth could reach up to his ears. And while he smiled, he took out a white object, directing it at me.

“Huh? What’s that? Some toy?”

“Not quite, Boo-san.” I answered the bewildered voice I could hear behind me.

“I’m surprised you know. Most people who see this just freak out. In fact, this is a *pistol*.” Sugar twirled the white object around his finger. “In this country, it’s practically impossible to obtain a gun. However, making one yourself is a simple task. And with a 3D printer, you can even make the bullets.”

“Simple...No way that thing’s gonna do anything...right?” Boudicia looked at the gun, and then at me.

“Shall we try?”

Sugar moved quickly. He directed the muzzle upward, pulling the trigger. **BANG**, a shrill sound followed, as the light above us broke.

“Careful!”

I quickly turned my back and protected Boudicia. Immediately after, I felt something graze my shoulder, as blood came gushing out. My skin was ripped open in a vertical line. The bullet must have bounced off from the light and shot down at us.

“Are you okay, Boo-san?!” I looked at Boudicia.

“I’m fine, but...”

Seeing that she was fine, I sighed in relief. Sugar kept on laughing, as

he stuffed his hand into his pocket, took out another bullet, and packed it into his gun.

“This time, I’ll shoot you directly. Scared, eh?”

Sugar’s gaze and the muzzle of the gun now were directed at me. And yet, I was feeling oddly refreshed, not pulling back.

“Not really, to be honest.”

“Playing tough now?”

“Sugar-san, I was scared of you. But, that’s not the case anymore. Because I understand you.”

I took one step forward. I could tell his eyebrows twitched.

“You won’t kill me.”

So far, I thought of Sugar as a *storm* or *tumult*. A walking *disaster* that swept up everything in its path. But, I was wrong. Standing in front of me right now, pointing the pistol at me, was a single artist who valued beauty over everything else.

“Heh, I wonder.”

“Hey, Yoshi! Stop it!”



Boudicia tried to step in front of me, but I stopped her with my hand. I can't let her get hurt, no matter what.

"You want to make Boo-san write another masterpiece. Right? Then...you should understand the risk of shooting me right here."

"Maybe she'll write it right here, right now, next to your dead body?"

“Would you like to try and see if she truly creates what you want?”

Silence filled the air between us. Sugar moved his head left and right, pretending to think about it, and then said—

“All right, let’s test it.”

Together with these words, he pulled the trigger. Something cracked.

“Yoshi!”

I heard Boudicia’s scream, as I closed my eyes. I wonder what it feels like to die. Is it cold? Warm? Is it bright? Or maybe dark? Will it feel like your body is floating? Or will you just fall asleep and never wake up? Whatever it was, I was ready to accept it. Because I felt her warmth on my back. And if I die protecting his warmth...Then that’s fine. However, when I heard Sugar’s voice, I opened my eyes. I could feel pain on my forehead, and I was probably bleeding—But, that was it. The pistol in Sugar’s hand broke apart and its pieces fell to the ground like snow.

In the end, a 3D-printed pistol can’t compare to the real deal. I can’t hope to compare to the regular guns sold on the market. In fact, it could barely shoot a second time.

“Hmm...*Lucky you*. Or, maybe this is *destiny*. Like every story eventually needs a worthy ending, don’t you think?” Sugar threw the gun away and smiled.

Even now, he was smiling. And innocently, too, like a child who kept the strawberry of a shortcake for last.

“I’m an artist...so, the only way you can stop me is with art. And if you so wish to let it come to that...then show me your art,” Sugar said and walked away.

“That sounds just fine. We won’t lose.”

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“I really thought I was going to die.”

“I thought you were dead!”

From Westminster Bridge, we looked down the River Thames. The scenery from the Thames side was truly what you would expect from London. In the distance to the north, we could see the Ferris Wheel, and the London Eye, and to the west was the familiar Big Ben, towering high. Further from that was the Westminster Palace, sitting between the communal and royal hospital. Gazing at this scenery, it really made me think that this is how a big city is supposed to be. Old and new mixed together, creating towers of history in the same place. Compared to Japan, which basically ended up as a blank slate, this was unthinkable. And even so, there will come a day when it will all be overwritten, just like graffiti. The scenery was so bewitching, I couldn't stop myself from laughing. Then again, it was probably also because the tension finally left my body.

“This ain't *funny*! If the gun hadn't broken then and there, you would be dead now!”

“Well, I was sure he wouldn't shoot me.”

“He sure as hell did!”

“No, the first shot already created cracks within the pistol. And I'm sure that Sugar-san knew that.”

Hearing my explanation, Boudicia looked at me in disbelief.

“In Japanese, we have an onomatopoeia for when people have their mouths open in shock, called *anguri*. And that couldn't be more fitting for you right now.”

When she heard that, she quickly closed her mouth and sighed like she was groaning.

“*Bloody hell*. Leave me alone with your *anguri*. I'm *angry*, y'know?” She moved her gaze toward the river, as she took out her trusted vape from her pocket.

I could pick up from the breeze that it was her favorite vanilla smell.

“Why are you even here in the first place?”

"That's my line. You suddenly vanished without a trace, so I was worried."

"...My bad. I just thought that I had to handle Sugar myself..."

"And I'm angry about that, *bloody hell*." I shrugged.

The sun began to set, as the light illuminated her eyes.

"So, you know...What I said before, I..."

She played with the zipper from her hoodie, trying to find the right words—when my smartphone rang and interrupted her.

"God! Who is it now?!"

"Wait, that's..."

I looked at the name on the screen and immediately picked up.

"*Hiya*, been a while, right?"

At first, I couldn't believe the voice I had just heard. It was a familiar voice that I hadn't heard in a long time. It was deep but pleasant, and I could never forget who it belonged to.

"George...san..."

"What?"

Hearing that name, Boudicia's eyes opened wide. And I don't blame her. He's been radio silent since that incident in the art museum.

"Hey, Yoshi. Gimme that, there's a mountain of things I wanna tell that bastard."

"Ah, wah!"

She tried to pull the phone out of my hands, almost dropping it into the river. Thankfully, I caught it before it was too late. Glaring at Boudicia, I put the phone on speaker.

"What were you doing all this time?!"

As you'd expect, Boudicia was furious at George. Leaving aside her tone, I actually felt the same way, so I didn't interrupt.

"Would you really ask that? It's because I had *work to do*, Roasted Beef-chan. Remember what my work is?"

George exchanged a few words with Boudicia like they always have.

"Hah, I never once saw you actually doing your work properly!"

"Doesn't mean I never did it. And I'm well aware of your work, as well as the situation in Bristol."

He stated that he was doing the handy work of the city council, but his main agenda was art and culture-related. Thinking about it, it would be weird for him to be in the dark about exactly what was going on. In fact, it was weird that he didn't act at all until now.

"George-san...What should we do?"

I asked before I could really think about it. Knowing George, he must have some kind of way out of this.

"Hey now, Yoshi-kun. Since when have you gotten so weak?" He said and laughed.

The faint vibration of my smartphone created from this quickly melted into the air.

"I'm being serious here."

"I know, and that's why I worked hard, too. I just needed some time."

"...Are you plotting something again?"

"Hey now, that's not a nice thing to say about someone else. I actually managed to set up a legal wall in Bristol."

"A legal wall..." I returned those words.

Just like the Banksy Tunnel, a legal wall was a location that allowed anybody to freely write graffiti without worrying about the

ramifications. As graffiti was generally regarded as a crime, it was the one space that let people run wild. However, Bristol still feared the invasion happening right now. Granted, more citizens have opted to support the writers of Bristol, but many still saw graffiti as a whole as the root of all problems. So, setting up a legal wall like this couldn't have happened during a better time.

"The location is at the Caroline Circus. All the posters and advertisements got cleaned off completely, so people can now write on it. And it's easy to see, too. It'll be open in two weeks. I know it's not immediately, but this is as quick as I could push it, sorry."

That surprised me. The Caroline Circus was located near the shopping mall in the center of Bristol. The place was always full of people, couples, and families everywhere, so it should be the location furthest removed from graffiti, at least legally. However, George must have seen through my doubt.

"The shopping mall is the window for the public, after all. And if the owner agrees, we can do everything. And I'm sure you must have an idea what could have brought this about."

"An idea..."

I don't know anybody in power at the shopping mall, so I was drawing a blank...No, if the place allowed for a legal wall to be instituted, then...Maybe I knew something, after all.

"Could it have been..."

"That's right. The owner of the shopping mall decided to write 'We are Bristol' on the wall."

We are Bristol—That's the catchphrase I decided to use. It was to unite all of Bristol's graffiti to fight against London. But to think that it could even reach such heights.

"I was always pressing the city council for a legal wall, see. But your actions were of the best timing, truly. Thanks to that, I could finally agree with them. Of course, the other side is made of businessmen, so they see this as an attraction. And to get those people on board, one

wall was an easy price to pay.”

Truth be told, the city council and Lara were always at each other's necks. Normally, the council would not allow graffiti to be accepted like this, but with all its complicated relationships coming together, they took one step further to be born after, and the timing couldn't have been better. Surely, George's influence must have been massive in this, too.

“They'd like to turn it into a new tourist spot while they're at it. I think they're dreaming too big for their own sake, but...Well, good luck.”

It truly was fortunate, but it didn't leave us with an easy way out, still.

“But, Sugar and the others won't stay silent with just this, right?” I asked.

The one to answer that question was Boudicia.

“Heh, that works just fine. Your thoughts are always crazy.”

“Exactly. Finally feeling the fire again, Roasted Beef-chan?”

“I'd rather grill you on the fire instead.”

I felt an odd sense of relief at hearing their conversation, as I thought about the meaning.

“Surely, the creation of this legal wall will make big news. That's why Sugar won't be able to ignore it, either. Especially since it's practically in the center of Bristol. We have to put our graffiti on there as quickly as possible, right?”

“Yeah. They won't let this chance go to waste. No matter how many people they have to gather for that.”

“In other words, if he writes graffiti that can't be beaten by the writers of Bristol...”

“Game over, yes. But at the same time, if you can beat London there,

it'll turn into a strong backwind against the invasion.”

In the street graffiti fights, there was no judge. And since Sugar said all that, he will definitely go out with everything he's got. That is why we have to beat him there. And the only one who can do that... is here.

“Yoshi-kun, you know what you have to do, right?”

“Yes.”

George knows. He knows what's going on in the town, as well as probably that Boudicia lost her way. And, he figured that I'm the only one who can do something about this.

“Hey, what's this about? You're not forcing Yoshi to do anything dangerous, are you?!”

“Well, that's how it is. I'll leave the rest in your hands, Yoshi-kun. Talk to you later.” George ignored Boudicia and ended the call.

“Hey, you parsley bastard! The next time we meet, I will serve you together with some fish and chips!” Boudicia roared into the phone, but I could tell she was energetic deep down.

And of course, her rage didn't reach Bristol, to begin with. But, he was right. It was time for Boudicia...No, for us to give an answer. Why do we write graffiti? What do we tell the citizens of Bristol?

“Boo-san, I'm sure you're aware, but we will end up clashing with Sugar. Can you win?”

“...What do you think?”

I couldn't immediately answer her. I told her that she has no soul. And that hurt her. Just like it hurt me before. Maybe she just wanted me to say that it's fine to quit. That she can stop writing if she doesn't want to any longer. But now, I know...it's not that she doesn't want to, she is simply lost. And in order to move forward, she has to see the truth, no matter how much it hurts her.

“Honestly, I think it's impossible as of right now.”

That's why I didn't even try to beat around the bush. I have to tell her what I think.

"Just as I said before, I think your graffiti right now has no soul. Meanwhile, Sugar packs a strong and beautiful message. And, is there something you want to convey with your work, Boo-san?"

Boudicia remained silent. She just had her gaze directed at the ground, her lips not moving at all. I could feel my chest tightening up in pain. Meanwhile, I spent my whole time not making up my mind. She has her own life, and I thought I shouldn't infringe upon that. I just watched over her as she was lost. But, I'm done with that. I'll accept it all, and give it to her. The answer I found myself.

"...Before coming here, I always thought about what to tell you once I'd met you."

The London breeze tickled the sweat on my palm. I could tell I was tensing up, as I swallowed my breath.

"In the end, I'm an outsider. I'm not a graffiti writer, I'm not a citizen of Bristol. I can't give you the answer you need."

"Well, I know that all too well..." Boudicia showed a complicated face.

"Instead, I'd like to bestow a snippet of knowledge onto you."

"...Where did that come from?"

"In Japan, we have *customs* that don't quite exist in Britain.

"*Customs?*"

"Yes. When it comes to two people going out, before they even go on dates, they begin by telling the other person of their feelings. This is what you call a *kokuhaku*, a confession."

"The heck? But if you don't actually spend time with that person, you won't know how you feel, right? And feelings constantly change. Are you gonna get *married* on the spot or something?"

"I agree. It really is *weird*."

"Sure is *weird*, yeah."

I looked at her smile.

"So with that in mind, there's something I'd like to tell you."

"What is it now?" She gave me a dubious look.

I should have told her sooner. But, as always...I lack behind when it comes to telling others of my feelings.

"I'm in love with you."

...There, I said it. Now, there was no pulling back any longer. Some things in this world are better left vague. Because it gives us relief and peace of mind. However, I...and Boudicia, too...We have to move forward. That's how it's supposed to go.

"Wha...W-Wait. Where did that come from...?!"

She looked at me like she had opened up a jack-in-the-box, freezing up completely. However, I could see her eyes slowly watering up, as she fidgeted and played with her fingers. Seeing her like that, I began feeling guilty. She must already have a lot on her mind, and yet I forced her to carry more baggage. Of course, I don't know if I did the right thing. But...I just felt like I had to tell her right now.

"People always change. They won't ever stay the same...or remain in the same place. It's the same for you and me. In truth, the fact that we met could be regarded as a miracle. Even now, we're in London, talking like this. It's truly *not understandable*."

"Not understandable...What's that phrasing..."

"But that is exactly why...No matter where we are, or what we do... whoever you may be with, you are Boo-san. And I'm fine with that. I'm sorry for my selfish *confession*, but...I don't think I would be able to go back home to Japan without telling you."

Soon enough, we'll be separated again. But, so what? Even if it may

end, that doesn't mean there was never anything, to begin with. Through the time we spent together, I grew attached to her. That's all it is...and that's all it has to be.

"I like you, Boo-san."

In a few seconds, Boudicia showed me a wide range of expressions. However, her cheeks couldn't hide the fact that they began to turn red. She looked like she wanted to say something, only to close her mouth again, shutting it tightly. She then looked away, turned her head toward the sky, and groaned. Finally, as she looked up at me, she continued.

"So...Going with your Japanese style...What am I supposed to do now?"

"You have two possible answers. *Yes* or *No*."

Only I could tell her about my feelings. And at the same time, only she knows how she feels. Of course, her answer won't change how I feel.

"I get it."

She showed a complicated expression, as she must have felt how serious I was.

"But, I can't give you an answer yet."

I tried as hard as I could in order to smile.

"Even if nothing changes, I can accept that. In fact, I don't need your answer, either. I just wanted to tell you."

I just pushed my feelings onto her. It's natural that she doesn't have an answer yet, and I don't expect one, either. But even so, it felt like a burden was taken off me.

"Then, let's go home. Taking the bus home might be better, too. And checking now..."

"Yoshi."

“Yes?”

“I’m not going.”

“Huh?”

At first, I didn’t understand what she was talking about.

“I’m not going home to Bristol.”

“Why?! Is it because of what I...”

“No. Not at all. But...I can’t tell you yet. If I did, it would lose all meaning.”

I looked into her eyes, and she returned that gaze. Her eyes were burning with determination.

“You’ll come to the legal wall, right?”

Boudicia didn’t answer. She just stepped onto the bridge hanging above River Thames with force, lacking all hesitation.

“I understand...Well, I actually don’t, but...”

I didn’t respond to her silence, but to her appearance right now.

“I believe in you, Boo-san.”

ake Street



14:10	Dublin	14:10	Dublin
14:15	Dublin	14:15	Dublin
14:30	Genova	14:30	Genova

Chapter 5: “Shapes of Things”

After that, I went back to Bristol...while leaving Boudicia in London. Since I caused JF a lot of worries, I went straight to the Bearpit, who was relieved when he heard that Boudicia was safe.

“Why’d she stay in London? That makes no sense!”

“Honestly, I don’t really get it myself.”

“If you don’t get it, then who else will!”

“Maybe she doesn’t really understand it herself, either.”

“What does that even mean...”

Since we just went in circles like that, I gave up and shrugged. Of course, the news already began reporting on the legal wall placed at the Caroline Circus. And no doubt, Sugar will know about it, too. That’s why...the final match will be held at the legal wall.

“Yoshi...The Ghost will come, right?”

“Um...Probably...”

JF was clearly worried, but I couldn’t dispel that worry, either. I remembered our conversation yesterday. I do believe Boudicia...But, there are too many things I don’t know. And it’s all because she didn’t tell me.

“It’s not that I don’t trust her, but...the what-if, y’know? What if she doesn’t come?”

“That’s...”

“You should know, right? If we can’t beat them now, we’re all over.”

“Maybe I could play the guitar to distract them?”

“Hey now, take this seriously.”

I tried to play the stupid guy in this slap-stick comedy to ease the mood, but yet again, I was reminded of the fact that I was powerless.

“We need a plan B. Anybody got something to draw?”

JF turned towards the crew, but no response came. As you would expect, since writing there meant shouldering the fate of Bristol. Is there really any writer who would take that upon themselves?

“Right...Guess I’ll have to...”

“*Oh dear.* It seems you’ve gotten a lot more confident in the time I have been gone.”

Suddenly, a familiar voice filled the Bearpit. And it was the voice we all wanted to hear the most right now.

“Captain!”

Everyone turned around in joy to look at their leader...But at the same time, they froze up. Lara was the same as always. Her bluish-green hair, her straightforward and reliable attitude...But, two things were different. First, the black eyepatch she wore over her eyes...as well as the white gips covering her arm.

“I’m sorry it took me so long.”

“Captain, is that...”

“Honestly, I would have loved to take a longer *vacation*. But since I was doing fine, the NHS kicked me out. Though, I bet they’re just busy.” Lara waved at us with her normal left hand, as she spoke with a light tone.

“How is Peni-san doing?”

Her expression changed for a moment and grew cloudy, but she gave a cheerful report.

“He still hasn’t gotten up, but his recovery is just a matter of time from what they said. It’s thanks to you, Yoshi.”

“...No, I’m just glad he’s doing fine. But, Lara-san...”

“Captain, can you...hold a spray can?”

The one who asked instead of me was JF. Needless to say, the other writers were curious about this, too, so it was a matter of time until someone asked this.

“I swear, you worry too much. Look.” Lara said nonchalantly and took out a spray can from her bag, beginning to write on the wall.

The familiar sound of it was fine-tuned in her rhythm, as her trademark beryl-green color filled the wall.

“One eye for one hand. Like a true Captain, no?”

The people in the crew got together and laughed in relief. However, something didn’t sit right with me. The graffiti itself was a simple slow-up, but during the later half of her work, I could faintly hear the spray shake. If one wasn’t involved in music, it may be impossible to pick up on this difference. Maybe it was just my imagination, too, but...

“But...I’m sorry, everyone. I couldn’t protect Peni...Or even Bristol.” Lara muttered with a hurt expression.

The other members of the crew also looked down.

“Well, Captain. I should be the one to apologize. I should have gone with you and Peni.”

Lara simply smiled, closing the eye that wasn’t covered by the badge.

“Thank you...But, I see this as a reward.”

Hearing a different voice from Lara they were used to, the whole crew went silent.

“I always believed that graffiti is something beautiful. That graffiti

can make this city flourish. But, that wasn't the case."

"Captain..."

JF tightly closed his eyes.

"Of course, this might be Sugar's fault. But without graffiti, this whole *invasion* wouldn't have happened. We're one spark that lit this fire. And I have the responsibility to carry. The sin to bear...So, this is my punishment."

A long silence followed. Painfully long, so. Nobody said a word, and there was no sound. It's like we were at the center of the storm. But finally, waves continued to spread.

"Captain, I can't accept this."

"JF..."

And this wave grew.

"I thought of quitting graffiti once. But, Captain, you told me to come back. Needless to say, I was really happy. But..."

JF turned his back toward Lara. He then picked up the spray can next to him, and began writing on the wall. And not just any wall, he overwrote Lara's own graffiti. His spray turned into a wave that swallowed Lara's graffiti whole.

"I didn't come back here because you told me to. I didn't continue because you told me to. It's because you're so damn cool...and because I wanted to be like you one day. That's why I chose to continue writing." He stopped his hand and then said: "But Captain, let me be honest. You're done for."

It felt like a tsunami crashed into the beach.

"JF...Who do you take me for?" She stomped on the ground, creating a loud bang inside the Bearpit.

"Nobody at all. Peni risked his life to protect you. What do you think that was for?"

“That’s...”

“The battle at the legal wall has the fate of all of Bristol resting on its shoulders. I can’t leave this town to someone who cries like that.” JF turned toward Lara. “Captain...No, Lara. I’m done chasing after you. It’s time for me to become you. So, give me the seat of the captain of **Queen Bear’s Revenge.**”

An eerie atmosphere reigned within the Bearpit. Normally, nobody would have paid any attention to JF’s words. However, he was determined. And the graffiti behind him spoke for itself. The beryl-green sea that Lara created was swallowed whole by JF’s blue tsunami. And the written letters JF in the center stood out, especially with the gold color. It was a bold graffiti that depreciated dedication and determination.

“This graffiti...You’ve grown, JF.”

“I didn’t waste my time just making coffee and recording songs, okay.”

The two glared at each other. It felt like this time continued forever. Finally, Lara glanced at me. She seemed relieved like a heavy weight was taken from her.

“...Very well. You can have it. From now on, you’ll be the captain.”

The crew whispered amongst themselves.

“However, if I think you’re doing a nasty job, I’ll kick your ass. Got it?”

“That’s exactly what I like to hear.”

“Everyone, are you okay with that, too?”

The crew was bewildered for a moment. However, they had to accept the facts. There was no guarantee that the Ghost would come, and their Captain had a broken wrist. The final battle between them and London approached. And, JF’s graffiti depicted strong determination. At first, it was only one of them who tipped JF on the shoulder to cheer him on. Then another followed, and even more came up until

the whole crew accepted it.

“Thanks, everyone. And with that decision done, it’s time to get to work. I still have to practice my own graffiti, and we have to spread **Queen Bear Revenge’s** work. So for starters...” JF began giving out orders, observed by Lara and me.

“Lara-san.”

“Hm? What’s up, Yoshi?”

“Are you sure about this?”

“Yeah.” Lara laughed without much hesitation. “I knew this day would come eventually.”

“Aren’t you...sad?” I asked.

She’s been thinking about Bristol this whole time. She wanted to protect the graffiti of this town. And yet, she gave the seat of the Captain to JF this nonchalantly. Of course, I understand that her arm is a big point of concern. However, it didn’t seem like that would be the biggest problem for her.

“That’s true. Well, I can’t say I’m too happy about this, but it’s a fact that I’ve gotten weaker. Not to mention...”

“Yes?”

“...JF wanted to quit graffiti at some point, and yet he went this far. That just made me happy more than anything.” Lara looked away from me, glancing at JF.

His curled-up back was straight, emitting confidence.

“Well, I’ve got my own idea about this, so it’s fine,” Lara said and closed her eye.

Or actually, it was a wink, but because of the eyepatch, I couldn’t tell at first.

“More importantly, Yoshi...Will Boo be okay?”

“About that...”

Since she was hospitalized this entire time, she didn't know the details of what happened. So, I explained everything. Except for the fact that I confessed my feelings because I was too embarrassed to do so.

“What should I do? Boo-san didn't say a thing, and I don't know where she is right now.”

“I think it's fine even if you don't do a thing.”

“Huh?”

Since she said so without hesitation, I was bewildered.

“I mean, Boo didn't say a word, right? That means you don't have to know.”

“But...”

“Don't you have faith in her?”

“Ugh...”

I couldn't argue against that. No argument in my mind could come out on top. Because deep down, I realized that Lara was right.

“Geez, pull yourself together. Don't you remember what Boo said? You're part of Bristol now.” She hammered her right arm and the cast onto my back, only to groan. “Ouch!”

“You're one to talk. What if your fracture doesn't heal?”

“Then that'll be it. I'll put it up to luck.”

“Don't go inviting any bad luck, please.”

“Luck is something you grasp yourself,” she said and put one hand on her hip. “Some things are out of your control. Even if you wish for it, there's no guarantee it'll end up in your hands. Even if you act like a saint, good karma won't always support you. But, I still don't wanna

give up. That's why I'm searching for the best possible method. And surely, Boo is the same. She won't give up this easily. On graffiti...as well as you."

Hearing that, I gasped. Lara definitely has gotten weaker, just as JF said. However, even stronger than before, she believed. In everyone other than herself. In JF, the crew, graffiti, as well as all the people living in this town. That's why she believes that everything will work out.

"How can you hold such profound faith, Lara-san?"

"Isn't that obvious? Boo is the writer I love more than anybody else."

I realized that I could never beat Lara. And at the same time, I was jealous of her. Believing in someone...can be so simple, yet so complicated at the same time. In my mind, I could see Boudicia's golden hair, illuminated by the sun. At the same time, Lara's beryl-green hair shone like the sea on a sunny day.

Chapter 6: “It’s My Life”

The two weeks passed in the blink of an eye. And on the day the legal wall opened up, I woke up much earlier. I stretched once and opened the curtains in my dorm room. The sky was clear blue, and the sunlight was oddly strong today. But this relaxing weather only made me feel more nervous. I left the dorm and walked down the stone-paved hill road. Aeon’s store at Park Row Street was still off-limits and blocked off with tape. The battle that began here will end today.

I descended the Christmas Steps, passed by the 8-Bit World, and walked alongside the police station that was filled with yellow and blue police cars when I saw a large building in the distance. It signaled the beginning of the Bristol shopping center, which acted as the focal point of Bristol and its various shops and restaurants. Normally, the place was mostly packed on weekends when people were out shopping, but today, it was especially packed, as everyone was awfully on edge. Down Pen Street, you can see a large billboard that says “Welcome to Caroline Circus.” However, the people didn’t line up for that. Instead, I realized they all came here to watch the events at the legal wall.

Their sheer numbers made it feel like all citizens in the center of Bristol had come here to gather, even if that wasn’t entirely accurate. And as I passed through the rows of people, I saw the white wall in question. The size and width must be around 6 meters, and the shape resembled a square. If memory serves me right, this was supposed to be filled with advertisements and other posters for the Caroline Circus. However, it was now a blank slate to be filled by graffiti, used as the item for the end of this war. Listening to the people whispering amongst themselves, it seemed like everybody knew this wasn’t just any random live performance.

If anybody were to write graffiti on this wall, it would definitely turn into an icon of Bristol. In this world, there exist singular moments

that move the whole world forward. Just as Banksy's Mild Mild West brought the battle between the citizens and the police to an end, this graffiti will surely deliver a conclusion to this invasion by London. This anticipation and anxiety filled the air here. Meanwhile, I looked for JF like a ship would look for a lighthouse. At times like this, JF's height really helped. I quickly spotted his bearded face and passed through the crowd.

Some tape was set up around the legal wall so that nobody could get too close. Inside there, he stood. Lara was with him, looking as dignified as always, as she looked around the wave of people. The other people from **Queen Bear's Revenge** stood around with tense faces. But, the fact that Aeon or Peni couldn't be with us was definitely a painful strike.

I figured that the police would be keeping a close watch on the situation, but I couldn't spot any. Maybe they were hiding amongst the regular crowd, or maybe they actually didn't bother with this...I had no idea. If it was the latter, then there was nothing stopping the writers, which left me anxious.

"So you're here, Yoshi. Come on in." Lara saw me and beckoned me inside the tape. "Hey, Yoshi."

"Yes?"

"Where is Boo...?" She whispered into my ear.

"She's not here."

"Did she get in touch with you?"

"No."

"I see..." She lowered the one eye I could see.

I contacted Boudicia several times after that, but she did not respond. Not even I know where she is right now. It's not that I don't have any faith in her...But it's a fact that Ghost isn't with us.

"So the Ghost isn't gonna be here, huh...Well, I had a feeling." JF seemed anxious as he rubbed his hands together.

If Boudicia really doesn't come here, then it'll be up to him to write the new graffiti. And who could blame him for being nervous?

"It's okay. We put this possibility into consideration. You can do this, Captain."

"I'm still not used to being called that."

Lara teased JF as she stabbed her elbow into his side, as his face distorted in pain.

"I wonder. If you're the captain, what does that make me?"

"I don't know...the *Ex-Captain*?"

"I don't like that. Makes me sound like some *ex-girlfriend* or *ex-wife*."

"Then don't ask me...What about *first mate*, then?"

"*First mate*...That sounds good. Like your number one mate. But in most pirate stories, it's the first mate who will betray the Captain, no?"

"Hey, Captain."

"JF, you're the captain now, remember?"

"...They're here."

Lara and I looked in the direction JF stared.

"Hey there, we're here."

The crowd of people split up, as a particular group appeared. Walking at the front of that was...

"So you're here, Sugar."

—A rainbow-colored unicorn.

"Everyone's gathered, I see. Wonderful. This tense atmosphere... *Uncomfortable, yet good*. Because no masterpiece can be created in peace."

Sugar flashed his usual smile, but his tone was definitely excited. And of course, Liquorice was right by his side. Sugar then turned toward the people and waved his hand. It was like he became the mascot of an amusement park. Then again, that might be how he feels about this town. Except he aimed to turn this amusement park into a layer of hell.

“And hello there, Yoshi-kun, Captain.”

He greeted us like we’d been friends for years, as he carefully inspected Lara.

“Hm, I guess I held back a bit too much. I didn’t expect you to be up and running this early. I thought everything was going well when you laid on the ground there.”

“*Oh my*. I’m the pirate who inherited *Teach’s* legacy. We’re not gonna stop even if you cut off my head.” Lara responded calmly but with determination.

She could stand here because Peni protected her. And yet, she showed no anger...because she knew the fight would be fought on the wall.

“And let me correct one thing. I’m not the Captain any longer.”

“...What do you mean?” Sugar showed a somewhat bewildered expression, as JF took a step forward.

“Yo, Sugar. My name’s JF. Captain JF, that is. I’m looking after **Queen Bear’s Revenge**. And I’m the man who will crush you today.”

Sugar looked at JF with one eyebrow up, only to sigh like he had seen through it all.

“Right. Okay. I see how it is. What a disappointment. Which mostly stems from you, Yoshi-kun. Some random nobody like him won’t put up the fight I desire.”

“You should decide that after you’ve seen my graffiti, dear Sugar.” JF stood in front of Sugar, glaring down at him.

Seeing this, Liquorice stepped forward, staring up at JF.

“You know what will happen if you dare to touch Sugar-san.”

“Yeah. Won’t happen as long as you know how to hold back.”

“That depends solely on your attitude.”

Sparks flew between the two.

“I swear...Playing pirates now, huh? Well, I do like outlaws. Can’t wait to give you a good beating.”

“Go ahead and try, punk.”

“Naturally. That’s why I came here.”

As they continued their discussions, the citizens watching from afar had gone completely silent. They were glued to every action JF and Sugar took.

“Sugar, let me state this clearly. If I win against you today, you have to leave Bristol.”

JF’s voice was directed at the citizens more than Sugar himself. In the end, the only thing deciding a battle of graffiti was the resulting quality. The air, flow, and message are what will decide the winner. That’s why JF declared this to the audience. And if Sugar truly sees himself as an artist, he can’t ignore this declaration. Because he’s an outlaw, he has to respect the laws that even outlaws possess.

“Hm...I see. Not bad, not bad. However, you’re only half-right.”

“Half-right?”

“What happens if you lose?”

“Then you can do as you please.”

“That’s so vague, though. Can I just take off your arms, for example?”
He spoke with the expression of a child that looked at a cake.

“Yeah.”

Surely, he must have felt remorse at that. I know that JF isn't as determined as he makes himself out to be. However, the way he stood tall like that showed none of that insecurity.

"But, I'm the only one who suffers. I'm the one fighting, so I'm the one losing. I'll carry the responsibility."

The crew members of **Queen Bear's Revenge** mumbled amongst themselves. Everybody was ready to suffer the consequences. However, with Sugar's arrival and the gang with him, it might turn into a battle for their lives. And as a writer, JF was talented. However, in terms of actual skill, Lara was above him, and he must be aware of that. If so, why did he push her aside to put himself in this position? But when I thought about it, it made sense. The slight discomfort I felt with the sound Lara's spray made, only someone into making music would be able to tell...And, there was one more person other than me present who fit that description.

"JF-san, are you..."

He turned his head toward me across his shoulder.

"...Ah, so you knew, too? You've got good ears, all right. Well, that's how it is. And you know the Captain. How many times do you think I listened to her?" He said and turned around again.

It was clear what JF was saying. Lara can't write graffiti any longer. She may have managed to fool the majority of people in that short time, but she probably can't keep that up for longer. And for that reason, JF decided to trade places with her. When I glanced over at Lara, I saw how she was staring at JF's back. She must have realized, but there was nothing that could be done. All I could do was pray for JF's victory.

"Haha, that's good. Real good. I'm feeling a lot better now. Of course, I won't just kill you, but I'll make it so you wish I did. Because then, you'll be able to write even better graffiti, I can guarantee that," Sugar said and wrapped his arm around Liquorice. "You're good with that, right?"

"Of course, as you wish."

Liquorice signaled something to the gang members, who brought plastic cases to her, filled with countless cans of graffiti. In response, JF put down his backpack and gathered the spray cans. The two faced each other in front of the big wall. And then, they took step after step to move away. It was like I was watching an old wild west drama. But instead of shooting at each other, they aimed the spray cans at the empty wall. Right as their fingers reached the cap of the graffiti—**GONG**, a dull sound filled the air.

“...Huh?”

And then, JF collapsed. Both citizens and crew were bewildered.

“Oh dear, oopsy daisy. I’m sorry, my hand slipped.”

The one who suddenly stood behind JF was none other than Lara. She may have smiled, but her face was distorted in pain. And only then did I understand what even happened. Lara had smacked JF from behind, using the cast on her arm. Seeing that, Sugar burst out laughing.

“Haha! Good, good! Captain Lara, you’re not half bad!”

“Oh my, I will gladly accept this praise. But as I said before, I’m not the captain anymore. You’re talking about the person sleeping on the ground. I’m just the First Mate, the one who always betrays the Captain in a pirate story. And...” Lara picked up the spray can JF had dropped, throwing it into the air to catch it with the arm that had the cast on it. “I will be the graffiti writer fighting you.”

I regretted my foolishness. Lara said she had an idea, but to think it would be this.

“Lara-san, this is ridiculous! You can’t...”

I screamed, but Lara pressed her index finger to my lips.

“Ah...”

The only person other than JF who knows that she can’t write anymore is me. Sugar, as well as **Queen Bear’s Revenge**, all believe that she’s doing just fine.

“Why...?” I whispered in a quiet voice.

She should know that she can't win, so why? Yet, she answered me without hesitation.

“If I don't do this, JF would never accept it, right?”

Countless people watched this battle, with the future of Bristol on the line with held breaths. The result would be given in an instant, and quickly spread across the town. However, if she were to take this battle all by herself, then the Captain of **Queen Bear's Revenge** would not have lost, strictly speaking. She has no intention of winning this battle in the first place.

“Lara-san, this isn't...”

I must have looked like I was about to break out in tears because Lara smiled at me with a grin as bright as the morning sun.

“No matter how beautiful or alluring the graffiti, it will disappear eventually. And one day, I won't be able to write anymore...After all, writing on the street isn't anything to admire.” She said and gently caressed her arm with the cast. “But even so...there's something I can do.” Lara looked around, and I did the same.

Many gazes focused on her and Sugar. They were waiting for them to start drawing.

“The writers of Bristol will continue to write. That's what we have to show them. I raised the writers of this generation as I watched their backs, so now it's time for them to watch my final work.”

A gust of wind blew past us. Her beryl-green hair swayed, as she faced Sugar. She looked like a captain standing proudly on their ship.

“Also, Yoshi, you seem to have the wrong impression about me.”

“Huh?” I was bewildered by her words.

“I'm a woman who can't easily give up, see.”

Before I could ask what exactly she meant, she already stepped

forward.

“Now, Sugar. Let’s start, shall we?”

Sugar responded with him clapping his hands.

“Wonderful. You have a truly alluring gaze in your eyes. Now I’m getting excited.”

“Oh my, thank you for the wonderful praise. However, you had to do it in the cruelest of ways. And that is as sinful as it gets.”

“Don’t humiliate Sugar-san,” Liquorice grumbled, but Lara didn’t seem too bothered.

“Liquorice, was it? Don’t you realize you’re just making things worse?”

Liquorice seemed close to leaping at Lara to beat her up, but Sugar stopped her as he raised his hand.

“Liquorice-chan, you know.”

“...Yes, Sugar-san.” She handed him the regular chocolate, wrapped in purple paper.

“Ahh, this is great.” Sugar put this into his mouth, not even bothering to remove the wrapping.

The entire place was feeling tense.

“Now, let’s do this.”

“Of course. I’ve been waiting this whole time.”

The two once again turned toward the wall. Silence filled the air. You could tell that the red thread holding this situation together was being pulled to its utmost limit. It stretched, and stretched, and stretched, and stretched, and then...reached its limit as it snapped. Immediately after, two separate spray cans started spraying on the wall. Sugar’s graffiti was created at immeasurable speed. The trails of his spray ran along the wall beautifully, yet came to life with such a

simple movement, as more and more colors appeared on it. And the spray cans were gradually exchanged with new ones thanks to Liquorice.

Meanwhile, Lara's graffiti was steady and sincere. He carefully controlled the spray, as a beautiful image was slowly being created. Her strokes moved in a confident rhythm, and at first glance, it looked like she was writing the same way as always. However, I could hear that the spray lost its cadence, as her hand began to shake. Sweat began building up on her face, and that was definitely not just because of the strong sunlight.

Finally, after some time had passed, the two pieces of graffiti were done. Looking at these works, the citizens talked among themselves. Lara's work was beautifully done. The letters formed the words "Queen Bear's Revenge," shaped like the waves of the ocean. On top of that was a boat, carrying several pirates on it. The pop-ish taste was definitely something that Lara would do. The graffiti connected the image of Bristol as well as the meaning of her own crew, which was very fitting as graffiti here at the shopping mall. She even managed to hide her insecure lines, so this could definitely be called a masterpiece.

However, Sugar's graffiti surpassed reason altogether. His graffiti depicted hell. The usage of colors created a toxic and grotesque image and made it feel heavy on the stomach. They looked like candy and jelly beans, but they took the shape of animal bones. Looking closer, you can't even see the spray trail, and from afar, it might even look like the real deal. On top of those was an arch that read the word "Sugar." Put in simple terms...it was death reincarnate. As well as beautiful.

The image it portrayed contained so much violence and the impact that you couldn't tear your eye away from it. And even the citizens who whispered amongst themselves now had fallen back into silence. You were forced to accept that this graffiti had the power to move hearts. Sugar was more talented than anybody else. I grit my teeth, thinking that maybe Lara would have had a chance if her condition wasn't so bad.

"And that's all, folks." Sugar looked around the citizens, opening both

his arms as he approached Lara.

He didn't seem too proud of his victory, only acting like this was the expected result.

"Now, it's time to keep your promise. What should I have you do... Maybe I can just leave you to my gang. They're used to handling girls like you. They'll make you feel good, at least. And then, you'll think you'd rather be dead. That'll be the beginning of it all. Your crew will be able to write beautiful graffiti."

"Yes, a promise is a promise. You can do with me as you please. However, I think we can leave that for later."

"...What did you say?"

"What would you call it? The *main dish*? *Climax*? Ah, I remember it now..." Lara said and turned around. "...The *cherry on top*."

Suddenly, I could hear mumbling. Past Lara's gaze, there stood—

"Hah, sadly I'm not gonna be some cutesy cherry, though!"

It was a blonde lion.

"I swear...You had me waiting a bit too long for my taste!"

"Call it being *fashionably late*."

"Boo-san!"

It took me a moment to realize that Boudicia stood right there. She had lost her cap somewhere, as her hair wasn't tied up into a ponytail, it swayed left and right. Her clothes were messy, looking like she had just returned from the battlefield. Not to mention that her clothes were covered with graffiti remains and her backpack was full of holes, allowing you to see all the graffiti inside.

Colored Version by <https://twitter.com/UroborosDragon>





“Just where...where have you been this whole time?!”

Before I could think, I ran toward her. And despite me getting emotional, she bluntly responded.

“Hm? Paris.”

“What?”

“Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, Copenhagen, and a few other places.”

“What were you...”

“Writing graffiti everywhere.”

I almost passed out from the shock. Looking at her, it was evident she didn't even live properly for the last two weeks. There's no way she would bother getting a reservation at hotels. She must have camped outside that whole time. How dangerous of a thing to do. What would she have done in the case of an emergency?

“I was worried about you!”

“Geez, I'm back here just fine, right?”

“Would you really call that fine...?”

I looked at her, and how much in tatters she was. Looking at her hair alone, she hadn't taken a shower for quite some time. And yet, amidst all of that...Her eyes shone brightly like crystals.

“Why are you...”

“Yoshi, you were right. I had no idea what I wanted to write. I had no soul after all. I was just doing everything half-baked. I probably never had one, to begin with.”

“That's...”

Her eyes...amidst all these people, she only looked at me.

“Yoshi. I was scared. Scared of losing you. And that fear is what left me unable to reach for anything.” She looked directly at me and smiled. “That's why I wanted to be alone for a while. Separated from you, and Bristol, too. So that I could become free. And without anybody around, I just thought about graffiti. I had to stand there with my own two feet.” She looked up at the sky, which was reflected in her clear blue eyes. “But...Now that I tried it, it was all so simple. The reason I couldn't write isn't because I was fulfilled. It's because I was too reliant on you, who looked just at me. Not as a graffiti writer, but as a normal person.”

“Boo-san, I...”

“She smiled and didn’t let me finish my words.

“Yoshi. You stand right there and watch me write my graffiti.”

Hearing her say that...I couldn’t stop her. And after she took a step forward, Lara was already waiting.

“I swear...what do you mean by *fashionably late*? If this was a date, I would have gone home by now. And buying time definitely wasn’t fun, either.”

“Oh, zip it. I was hurrying back here, okay!”

“...Can I leave this to you?”

“Yeah.”

The two looked at each other. And then, Boudicia slapped her left hand onto Lara’s right hand. A shrill sound rang out, and Boudicia turned toward Sugar.

“Sugar, let’s finish this.”

“Of course, that’s what I’ve been waiting for.”

“Wait a moment. **Queen Bear’s Revenge** has already lost against Sugar-san. We won’t stand by idly as you break your promise.”
Liquorice intervened.

Expectedly so, you could say. This battle had already been decided once.

“Huh? The hell are you on about? Why are you lumping me together with them?”

As Boudicia pointed at the girl with her beryl-green hair, Lara shrugged once. Everyone else was just as bewildered.

“Haha...”

And yet, I couldn’t help but laugh. It’s because I realized what

Boudicia tried to do...What she intended to do. And that was just so ridiculous, I couldn't control myself. She glanced over at me and grinned, declaring exactly what I expected.

"I don't belong to Bristol's **Queen Bear's Revenge**, nor am I a part of London's **Sweet Tooth**. Didn't I just say so? I came from Paris. Thus, I'm the Ghost of Paris...Actually, what's ghost in French, again? Whatever, um...bonjour, I guess?"

The Ghost of Paris—Le fantôme de Paris.

The Ghost of Amsterdam—De geest van amsterdam.

The Ghost of Berlin—Das Gespenst von Berlin.

The Ghost of Copenhagen—Københavns spøgelse.

As she went around all these places, she became all of those...yet none at all.

"I'm the Ghost. I'm not related to anybody. I'm everywhere...and nowhere at the same time. I'm just a Ghost."

"What ridiculous logic...!"

Liquorice had remained calm thus far, only now to fume with anger.

"I'm not joking, you know?" Boudicia said with a serious tone as she placed her ripped backpack on the ground, took out a spray can, and shook it with her left hand.

"I'll overwrite both your graffiti at the same time. And if I win then, you'll both be the losers. I'll have the right to do with all of you as I please. Ain't that right?"

No, it's not right at all. However, as flawed as that logic may be, the power it possessed was indisputable. Everybody gasped in anticipation, wondering just what graffiti she would present to them. And with everyone burning in such excitement, not even gang violence could interrupt it. Of course, Liquorice was aware of that. And, it was none other than Sugar who wanted to see what Boudicia would write.

“Let her be, Liquorice-chan. She’s finally motivated again.”

“But, Sugar-san...”

“Hey now, I thought you’d know that better than anybody else, but...” Sugar gently embraced Liquorice. “...You won’t listen to my words?”

“...!”

Sugar put strength into his arms. Even though he was a regular human, it almost looked like he could snap her back in two. Finally, Sugar let go, and although Liquorice didn’t seem too satisfied, she stepped back. Meanwhile, Boudicia put her hand on the wall, closing her eyes. Nobody here could fathom what graffiti her mind was writing right now. But that’s exactly why she’ll write. She slowly opened her eyes, reading the spray. And then, she began to overwrite the two large graffiti on the wall. I’ve watched her write this whole time. From the moment she began writing with her left hand...to the moment she acquired a new style. And yet, this sight of her right now didn’t match the one in my memory.

Put simply, her movement was far too natural. Every person breathes in, breathes out, walks, and grows. But her movement didn’t look like a sequence at all. It was all one connected form, depicting nature itself. Like you would look at a blooming flower at the side of the road while taking a stroll, or looking up at the clear blue sky. Not even her thought process of what to write was present. She was just there and did as she wanted. And...while doing so, she smiled.

So far, she always wrote her graffiti while having a conflicted expression. Obsessed with victory or defeat, concerned with the quality of it, always facing her own graffiti head-first. I know that more than anybody else. And yet, that radiance in her eyes made my heart flutter. Her legs slowly but steadily moved up from the ground. Finally, she floated in the sky, as her arms wandered from one end of the wall to another, giving the wall a different image. Bristol, London, being alive, dying, loving, being loved—she was free from all and every weight—In the truest sense, she was like a Ghost. The spray acted like a gust of life, and from the trail, I could see Bristol’s scenery.

The Wills Memorial Building.

The Bearpit.

Ursa.

The Mild Mild West.

The Clifton Suspension Bridge.

The Giant's Cave.

The Clifton Observatory.

The Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.

River Avon.

Bristol Temple Meads Station.

The Ark.

The Millenium Square.

The Caroline Circus—

Everything she wrote was so vibrant and cheerful. Oh yeah, this is what Bristol has always been...That's the strength this graffiti emitted. Finishing the smaller scenery, she returned to the center of the wall. And finally, she wrote letters in the space left there. Lines turned into beautiful surfaces, only to then turn into lines again, as all we spectators were deceived with each step until the graffiti was done. And written there, it said—***Now and here.***

"All right." Boudicia faintly muttered as she walked to the corner, adding her signature.

For a moment, nothing but silence filled the air. Everyone's hearts were entranced by the sight in front of them...By the beauty of the graffiti that she had created. There was no deeper message she conveyed. However...the scenery of the town in front of us...It just existed. And the beauty of that was visible on the wall. Finally,

someone started clapping. It was only scattered at first, but more and more people joined in, as they began cheering. And then, they started chanting—We are Bristol. Right now, everyone's hearts become one. At the beauty of this city, the feelings we share. I found myself in a trance, only to be pulled back to reality when Boudicia stood in front of me.

“Boo-san...”

“Yoshi, what do you think?” She seemed a bit flustered, as she asked for my opinion.

“Just look around you. That's all the answer you need.”

“Yeah, sure. But, I want to know what you think.”

I thought of what to say. But, I couldn't. All the emotions inside of me filled my throat. No matter what I might say, it wouldn't be enough to express how I feel. That's why I gave on conveying with my words...and embraced her. Boudicia snickered and wrapped her arms around me, tapping them on my back like you would do when soothing a child. From that, we slowly separated again.

“I went to see all sorts of places after that. But, no matter where I went, or what I did, I couldn't find what I wanted to convey, or even a reason to write. In the end, I don't really have anything I want to tell others.”

Her golden hair shone brightly. Her translucent blue eyes looked straight at me.

“But, no matter where I went, all I saw were walls. I looked for graffiti, found one, and overwrote it. In the end, it was all so simple. I knew from the very start. I like graffiti...and I like Bristol, too.”

The cheering suddenly felt so distant. Almost like Boudicia and I existed in our own world, away from everyone else.

“Sure, those feelings might change one day. What I have left from yesterday, what I wanna do tomorrow...Hell do I know about any of that? But that's also why...” She breathed in and showed a warm smile. “...I want to write the things that I like right this very

moment.”

“That answer is very much like you, Boo-san.”

After all the struggle I went through to push a few words up my burning throat, this was all I could manage.

“Hey, Yoshi. I could write all this because you told me that I had no soul back then.” Boudicia said and offered me her left hand.

She then realized something and pulled it back to wipe it off with her hoodie, pushing it toward me again.

“Thanks.”

I took her hand with my right one and then tightly pressed it. That’s right. We’re always looking for the existence of our soul, but...that’s something you search for. You have it from the very beginning. But, it just so happens that you tend to forget about it once in a while.

“Boo-chan...This is a *true masterpiece. Well done.*” Sugar stared at the graffiti written by Boudicia. “So, let me be clear. If I manage to overwrite this, then that means it’s my victory, right?”

His sharp tone cut through the air.

“Yeah, of course.” Boudicia said, yet she seemed calm and composed.

And yet, Sugar wasn’t done. He looked at her graffiti and snickered to himself.

“The time has come. It worked out so well. So surprisingly well. Isn’t that right, Boo-chan?”

“What are you on about, Sugar?”

“To overwrite something, you need to create something that is harder to achieve, or something that boasts itself in greater quality, right? But think about it. If I overwrite your work and everyone admits that mine is better, then that means I win. That’s why I will overwrite your *historical piece.*”

“Go ahead, then,” Boudicia confidently said. “I’m a writer myself. If your graffiti’s that much better, I’ll accept it.”

Sugar raised his hand that held the spray can. Everybody swallowed their breaths, watching over Sugar.

“...Why...”

“Sugar-san?” Liquorice seemed worried as she called out to Sugar.

“Why...can’t I write...!” Together with his scream, the spray can fell to the ground. “I waited for this day! For this day I could overwrite Boo-chan’s true masterpiece...! Everything worked out! So why... won’t my hand move?!”

The rainbow colors drifting around Sugar fell to the ground. I understood what was happening. No matter how flawed, Sugar is an artist. He has to accept that the graffiti in front of him is something he can’t beat, no matter how much he might try...to the point it touches his very soul. Like a broken doll, Sugar began laughing. He laughed, and laughed some more, to the point that I felt a chill run down my spine, even though the sunlight was so strong today. Something’s not right...

“I have to lose something again. This isn’t enough. I must get closer to death...And the closest thing...is to give in to its sweet embrace. In other words...” Sugar said and took off his hoodie. “...I just have to become the graffiti myself.”

Through this, he revealed several cans wrapped around his body. Upon that sight, my body began shivering. It’s because I understood what I was looking at—**TATP**. It’s the same explosive that burned Aeon’s shop to the ground. And before the crowd realized and could raise screams, Sugar declared.

“What do you think? It’s stylish, right? Also, if I even see one person trying to run, I’ll press this switch here. You should really be careful not to cause a ruckus...because this baby here has enough power to blow up all the people present here. Which includes me, of course,” Sugar showed the switch in his right hand and laughed.

Now, everyone was controlled by Sugar. They all stood face-to-face with death, yet they couldn't say a word. Even a single finger must feel heavy as lead. And this craziness of his now turned into absolute power.

"I'll overwrite it...Your graffiti, with an explosion and blood. Then, I myself will become graffiti. Sacrificing my own life to finish it... There can't ever be a masterpiece greater than mine! Isn't that right, Boo-chan?!"

"Stop it, Sugar! You've crossed the line of graffiti and overwriting!"

"I guess we just think differently. What I'm concerned with...is if it's art or not. But, Boo-chan, you're also putting your life into your graffiti, right? This is the exact same."

Oddly enough, I wasn't scared. I was the only one who was free from that absolute power. Sure, Sugar has gone completely mad. But, he still is an artist. He's determined more than anybody else, more strict and sincere when it comes to art, and more blessed than most people, yet still a single artist at the end of the day. I know that. And then, I remembered Gabriel's words. If I really have that talent he saw in me...then I should be able to understand what Sugar is thinking.

I looked around. The citizens, the gang members, the crew members of **Queen Bear's Revenge**, the collapsed JF, Lara as she held her hands in front of her mouth, Liquorice just quietly watching over Sugar...and Boudicia standing next to me. I looked closely at all their expressions. If there is one thing that could stop this madness...one method only...if I can find the path to salvation amidst absolute darkness...then I don't mind becoming a *snake*.

"Boo-san." I quietly called out to her.

"...What?"

"Do you trust me?"

"Why is that a matter of discussion right now?!"

"Do you trust me?"

I kept my eyes glued to Sugar while reaching for her hand. The absolute passion coming from her left hand ran all over my body. This is the same hand that wrote that g graffiti. She seemed surprised for a moment, but then closed her eyes and let out a snicker.

“...With you, even *hell* sounds like a walk in the park.”

That’s what I wanted to hear the most right now. I pulled her closer, and ignored the faint shriek she let out. Then, I embraced her.

“What’s this, Boo-chan? I didn’t think you were the type of person to die in the arms of a friend.”

“Y-You’re wrong, this isn’t...”

“That’s right. This isn’t quite what’s happening.”

I put strength into my arms to ensure she couldn’t go anywhere. Then, I reached into my pocket to remove the cap from the pen I received from Lara. In return, the sharp tip ended up in the open. I closed my eyes once to take a deep breath...and then I took out the pen, pointing the tip at Boudicia’s neck.

“...Huh?”

She looked at me in shock. I could feel her body quivering in my arms, but I pretended not to realize it.

“...What are you plotting?” Sugar glared at me with such intensity it was even stronger than when he pointed the gun at me.

“Throw away that switch and raise both your hands. If you don’t do that...” I declared without showing any emotion. “I will kill Boo-san right here, right now.”

The people watching gasped.

“Wait, Yoshi?! What are you thinking?! Why would you...”

“Please be quiet, Lara-san.”

I could hear Lara’s scream and Liquorice step on the ground. Both

were pretty far away from us. I could pierce Boudicia's neck much faster, and they knew that.

"Have you gone mad from the fear and terror of death?" Sugar asked while laughing.

However, I could tell he was shaken.

"Not at all. I'm fairly calm and absolutely serious."

"Also, there's no way you could possibly kill Boudicia..."

"Should we try it, then?"

I put more strength into my grip on the pen. The tip slowly began to bite into her thin skin.

"Ugh...Agh..."

Her face distorted in pain at that.

"E-Even so, you both will die soon. What meaning is there in doing this?"

"I'm just trying to help you, Sugar-san."

All eyes were on me. Their ears were waiting for my next words. I could feel absolute control over their breathing.

"You said that you want to surpass the graffiti you created on that day. You managed to write something so inspiring because you lost someone close to you, right?"

Sugar didn't respond, but it didn't matter since that wasn't the crux, so I continued.

"Then...Let me kill Boo-san. If so, you'll be able to write something even better than before. For that, you'll sacrifice everything, right? That's how you acted so far. Because if all that was a lie..." I stopped for a moment, and then pulled the trigger. "...Then you're not a true artist."

Sugar's eyes opened wide and he burst out laughing. He laughed in such a grotesque way, his body bent forward. And after he laughed for a long time, he spoke up.

"What you're saying is true. I'm a true artist. Thank you for reminding me. So, do it. That will allow me to create the greatest work imaginable."

"Then, I'll count to five."

"A countdown, hm? Wonderful. And once it turns to zero...I'll press the switch."

"I will kill Boo-san."

"Let's count together."

"Let's."

The crowd couldn't handle it anymore, as people began screaming. Roars of anger and terror reached my ears. Footsteps trying to escape sounded like earthquakes.

"5."

Some people from the gang already had their backs turned toward us, running. They tried to drag Liquorice with them, but she wouldn't move.

"4."

Lara screamed as she wanted to run toward us, but the people from **Queen Bear's Revenge** restrained her. Others carried JF's body away.

"3."

The smile vanished from Sugar's face, as his cold eyes made my body shiver.

"2."

Using my open arm, I gently embraced Boudicia, whispering “I’m sorry” into her ear.

“1.”

She didn’t say a word and just turned her neck to look up at me—smiling. That’s right, the ending arrives sooner or later. I was reminded of the movie we watched together. Even if this is the end, and even if destruction awaits...I want to welcome this ending together with her.

“0.”

And then, the countdown reached its end—Silence followed. Nothing happened. The crowd stopped their movement, too. With the gang at her back, Liquorice slowly began to move. At the same time, Lara’s tears began to dry on her cheek. The hand of Sugar holding the switch was shaking. Meanwhile, I kept the pen pressed against Boudicia’s neck. She had her eyes closed, tightly wrapping her arms around me. After a moment passed like this, I spoke up.

“Sugar-san, I knew that you couldn’t press the switch.”

His long eyelashes cast a shadow down his face.

“Because if you really went with this method, then you’d have to accept...the fact that you can’t beat Boo-san when it comes to graffiti.”

His shoulders twitched.

“And if she were to die here, you’d have lost forever. And I wanted you to realize that...even if I had to take a grotesque method like this.”

I mostly relaxed my body, but Boudicia still clung to my arm. I don’t blame her, considering what I did. The black dot on her neck was still thick.

“No! I can do it...I can...” Sugar howled like a sulking child, as another hand appeared on his.

This hand belonged to Liquorice.

“Let’s stop this, Sugar-san. I understand how you feel.”

“Liquorice-chan...” Sugar looked into her black eyes with shock, returning to his senses. “Why...? I can still press the switch, and you’ll be caught in the explosion. Aren’t you scared?”

“I am scared.”

“Then...!”

“But, not of me dying. I’m scared that you will die, Sugar-san.”

“What are you...”

“I’ve always lived on the street, forced to join the gang if I even wanted to survive. I was always suffering, always tired of living... Sugar-san, do you remember the day we met?”

“Yeah...I do.”

“You saved me when I wanted to jump in front of the underground railroad. And then, you told me—That my desire to die made me beautiful.” Liquorice tightly grasped Sugar’s hand. “I was really happy. Nobody has ever said something like that to me.”

Sugar looked down, running his hand through his hair like he had gone insane.

“No...I never had any interest in you!”

“That’s perfectly fine.”

“How could that be fine?! You don’t understand!”

In the face of Sugar’s outburst, Liquorice just calmly smiled.

“I do. Sugar-san, you like Ghost-san, don’t you?”

“...!”

“That’s why you want her to write. You wanted to overwrite her. I

realized that long ago.”

“Then why...”

“I was fine just being by your side. That woman from London...the Ghost of Bristol...I’m fine being nothing but a *substitute*. That’s why I was happy every time you used me.”

At some point, the audience had turned quiet, listening to their conversation.

“Sugar-san, you are the greatest artist in this world. That’s why you must save more people. Just as you’ve done with my own...No, my very soul. Back then, I died once. But now, I will live for your sake... Right now, and from now on...forever.” Liquorice gently embraced Sugar. “Sugar-san, *I’m all yours*.”

“...Even if I don’t feel the same way?”

Liquorice faintly smiled.

“*Absolutely*.”

Sugar tried to say something and opened his mouth. However, no words followed, and he tightly closed it again. He then looked over at Boudicia.

“You know, Boo-chan...I was always jealous of you. I wanted to beat you. And, I don’t know if that’s what Liquorice-chan was talking about...But, I’m sure that I was thinking about you all this time.”

“Sugar...”

“You changed, right? You’re not the same Boo-chan as I knew you before.”

“Yeah. I...wanted to change.”

“I see.”

Oddly enough, Sugar seemed satisfied.

“But, he was gonna kill you, right? Are you sure about that?”

“Well, I believe Yoshi. And, sure, I was hella scared and it kinda hurt...But, it felt like I wouldn't mind even if he killed me.”

“Why?”

“Didn't you say so before? People always die. And Aeon keeps saying how life is like a never-stopping trail of spray. That's why I bet on whatever he tried to pull...So that I wouldn't regret the result.”

Hearing Boudicia's words, Sugar looked up at the sky.

“Ah, I see. That's how you could write something like that.”

He looked at Boudicia's graffiti. And then further above, at the clear blue summer sky. If you go beyond there, you won't be able to come back. Nobody could know how he must feel, but...I really hope the person he sees in his eyes is smiling back at him.

“...Boo-chan, I lost.”

As these words reached them, the audience cheered. The people from **Queen Bear's Revenge** jumped for joy, too. Lara began crying again, as she leaped at Boudicia. JF even woke up but was completely lost on what was going on. Sugar began quivering, only to be supported by Liquorice.

“...As promised, you can do with me as you like.”

“No, let me take the blame. Whatever you want Sugar-san to do, I'll do it,” said Liquorice.

Boudicia thought about it for a moment and then spoke up.

“Once Aeon's feeling better, come visit. That's all I got.”

Many different expressions flashed up on Sugar's face. Surprise, anger, acceptance, and...a bit of gratitude.

“And then...I'll make sure to overwrite your graffiti here.”

“Yeah, go ahead and try.”

More gang members arrived to take Sugar’s shoulder. Waiting for them were police officers wearing yellow safety vests.

“This is the Avon-Somerset Police. You know what’s waiting, right?”

Sugar said and nodded.

“Let’s go, Liquorice-chan.”

“Of course, Sugar-san.”

Sugar stepped into the police car first, with some of the other gang members following.

“...Um, Liquorice-san?” I called out to Liquorice, who wanted to follow after Sugar.

“What?”

“Thank you very much.”

When I thanked her, she gave me a dubious look.

“Did I do anything that would deserve your gratitude?”

“Back at the tunnel.”

Liquorice’s eye twitched as she heard that.

“You were the one who wrote the letter, right?”

“...Yes. I’m sorry, I used my gang to find out where you live.”

Clearly, it couldn’t have been Boudicia who wrote that. And other than Sugar, there is only one person who could know where Boudicia was headed—Namely, Liquorice.

“I don’t get it. Why would you give me that letter?”

Liquorice looked down and went silent. She then whispered in a quiet voice to make sure nobody but me could hear her.

“...Will you keep this a secret from everyone?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Even from the Ghost?”

I made sure that Boudicia stood away from us and nodded. Liquorice faintly bent her back to move closer to my ear.

“*I was jealous*. Jealous of Ghost-san. That’s why I wanted you to come to meet her. Because...I thought Sugar-san would come back to me, then.” Liquorice moved away and showed a faint smirk. “Actually, I’m not satisfied just being a *substitute*.” She said and walked away.

That might have been the first time I genuinely saw her smile.

“Hey, what did she tell you?”

I heard Boudicia’s voice, so I quickly turned around.

“Huh? You were watching?”

“Well, duh.”

“Um...It was about the letter...Actually, never mind.”

“What? Is it something you can’t tell me? What letter? When did you get that?”

“It’ll be a bit hard to explain...But anyway, I promised to keep it a secret, so I can’t tell you.”

“Huh? Does it have something to do with me?”

“Maybe?”

“Then...does it involve you?”

“Quite possibly.”

“But...she didn’t invite you to anything, right?”

I barely contained myself from bursting out laughing. But at the same

time, I wanted to tease her a bit.

“Who knows?”

“What the hell?! Tell me!”

“But you just said you trust me, right?”

“It still hurts, okay?! I really thought you’d off me!”

“Then it worked just fine. It had to be authentic.”

“What if this leaves a mark?! I can’t get the ink out of a wound.”

I looked at the black dot on her neck.

“I’m sorry...But, I’m glad you’re okay.”

“...Right back at you.”

I found myself selfishly wishing that this mark would remain there forever, just like the graffiti on the wall. But, even if this wish doesn’t end up being granted, it’s not like everything will disappear. For now, at least. I gently touched her neck, to which she relaxed her shoulders—and we shared a deep hug.

Advertisement

Epilogue: “Let It Be”

Following that, the feelings and emotions regarding Bristol’s graffiti changed greatly. The incident surrounding the legal wall made it into the news, and they reported on the fact that the writers of Bristol fought back against the invasion of London’s gang. They even referred to it as the London Invasion, and it was honestly laughable how everyone suddenly jumped onto the graffiti culture bandwagon. And, it might be thanks to George working in the shadows that everything was cleared up so smoothly. Of course, the general problem of graffiti wasn’t resolved, but the general conception of it had gone up drastically.

I watched these news together with Boudicia in my dorm room. Each time the graffiti she wrote showed up on the screen, I was reminded of the fact that the left hand who wrote that was right next to me. And with this much attention, the Caroline Circus quickly turned into another famous spot for Bristol. Surely, the owner probably didn’t expect this, but he definitely didn’t complain. And with this making the rounds, it was probably only a matter of time until more legal walls popped up all over Bristol.

At the same time, Boudicia’s graffiti was accepted by many citizens as a new landmark of Bristol. Other people began writing on it, too, but nobody dared to touch hers that shone brightly in the center. Of course, there was no guarantee that would remain forever. However, I wished for the feelings she documented on that wall that day to remain alive. According to George, the police had sight of the whole situation, with snipers stationed all over ready to take out Sugar. He laughed, saying he barely managed to keep them in check, but I could only shiver in fear at the thought of that.

Lara’s eye and arm healed up just fine. Her arm was only broken but didn’t suffer any severe injuries, so with a bit of training and hard work, she should be able to move it the same way as before. She

begrudged the fact that didn't become a one-armed pirate and laughed, but I couldn't see it as lightly, considering how Boudicia ended up at first. On a side note, she really grew attached to wearing an eyepatch on one eye, so she's wearing it still. And she even said that she could save herself the time doing the makeup for one eye, which was a reason very much like her.

It took a bit longer until Peni recovered. However, even as he was plastered in a hospital bed for a long time, he seemed satisfied that he managed to protect Lara, and he was in absolute joy when he heard how **Queen Bear's Revenge** protected Bristol. JF ended up being the real loser. He may not have suffered any severe injuries, but having basically missed all of the action, that fact alone turned into a legend in itself, which he deeply resented. But, his first mate Lara just encouraged him to make a legend of himself from now on, and he officially inherited **Queen Bear's Revenge**. His determination earned him the trust of the crew, whereas a few still stood after Lara, so they both ended up being the official leaders.

Gabriel obviously learned of the legal wall, voicing his support. Granted, he still didn't change his opinion of graffiti in the long run, but that didn't surprise me. Instead, I heard that he'd been in contact with Nelina, acting as music pals, so to speak. Then again, the two somewhat resemble each other, so maybe they'd even end up making music together at some point.

As for Sugar and Liquorice, I was a bit in the dark regarding them. But surely, they will be prosecuted and repent for the crimes they've committed so far. However, they have their own justice and value of beauty, so they'll surely live a righteous life after everything has been resolved. Granted, we might end up running into each other at some point, but a part of me hoped that we'd be able to get along a bit better than before.

Finally, Aeon only regained consciousness after everything had been resolved. It'll still take time for him to fully recover, so he just spent his time laying in the hospital bed, but hearing that he won't take any long-lasting negative effects from this, both Boudicia and I sighed in relief.

"I'm really sorry, you two."

When we came to visit him, he had already seen the news, so those were the words he greeted us with.

“What are you talking about? We gotta help each other in our time of need, right?” Boudicia reassured him.

Hearing that, Aeon flashed his white teeth and grinned.

“Thanks, you two.”

And then, Boudicia and I spent our days together as before. The fact that I would return home to Japan hasn't changed. But, we stopped running away from it. Because we have this limited time, we decided to use it as we wanted and toured all of Bristol. And everywhere we went, Boudicia wrote. And all of her works were so free and natural, they possessed a magic charm to just naturally melt into the scenery. The only problem was that she wanted to use the right colors for the right place, so she had to pack three times the amount of spray cans than usual, which I was forced to carry.

But, the days we had left, we spent in satisfaction...Until the promised day arrived. I had put all my belongings into my suitcase, excluding the guitar. Then again, I didn't bring much with me, to begin with, and I didn't buy many new things to take home with me, so I didn't struggle much with packing. When I first arrived in Bristol, I was really concerned with the noise my suitcase made as it rolled along the pavement, but now, it was like River Avon just took all that with it. My plan was to leave at Bristol Temple Meads Station, head to London, and then fly from Heathrow Airport to Narita. It even took me a bit longer to get to the train station, so when I got there, the train awaited me, as well as everyone else.

Peni, JF, Lara, and Aeon...But, not seeing Boudicia had me worried. I made sure I told her the right time when Peni suddenly began bawling.

“Yoshi...You're really going back, right...”

“Peni-san...I'll come to visit again.”

“If not for you...I would have died...I know it can't be compared, but

I made some burritos, so please take them.”

“Thank you.”

I accepted the plastic bag filled to the brim with burritos. Honestly, I was a bit worried if I could even finish all of these, but I was happy nonetheless.

“Once you get your new song done, make sure to send it over. I’ll let you know once we get our work ready. Gabriel said he’s looking forward to it, too.” JF said and tapped me on the shoulder.

“Yes, I’ll look forward to it. Let’s play again someday.”

“Ayo. I’ll let you know if we need your guitar again. In today’s day and age, you can just send over your recording, after all.”

“That is true.”

Although I felt a bit of regret to leave Bristol and them all behind, it was a fact that we could easily stay in contact thanks to the internet. We can even make music together. So, while we won’t be able to meet directly, this wasn’t a goodbye forever.

“*Oh dear...*It still hasn’t really set in that you’d be leaving today, Yoshi. I feel like we barely met yesterday.”

“Yes...And now that I can be honest, I was actually a bit scared of you when we first met.”

“Oh my, and I thought you were some weakling.”

I laughed, and she did as well.

“I guess we are quite similar.”

“That is true.”

Lara sighed and narrowed her eyes as she looked at me.

“Thank you, Yoshi. If not for you, Bristol might have lost its precious graffiti.”

“No, I didn’t really...”

“You should be more proud of yourself...Though I didn’t expect you to use my pen like that.”

“I’m sorry...”

“I’m impressed. You look like you couldn’t even hurt a fly,” she said and placed her hand on my shoulder. “You should be fine no matter where you go.”

“I believe public safety in Japan is quite good, though?”

“Bristol isn’t bad either, you know?”

I couldn’t contain my laughter at hearing that. She might be right, but after everything that happened here, I found it hard to just nod along. And she must have guessed that, as she smiled.

“Anyway...take care, Yoshi.”

“Of course, Lara-san.”

The next person who approached me was Aeon, and I looked up at his tall figure. He was still a bit weak when he was hospitalized, but now he was back to normal and even restarted his training. His muscles had come back already.

“I had fun having you here, and I’ll make sure to visit if I ever come to Japan, so make sure to show me around.”

“Will that really be necessary?”

“There are countless things in this world that I don’t know, after all.”

“That is also true.”

Even this kind of advice was very much like Aeon. There are still many things that I don’t understand. Until I came to Bristol, I didn’t know anything about graffiti. And that must be the case for countless other things.

“Yoshi, um...I wanted to thank you for Sugar. As well as Boudicia. You did what I couldn't.”

That awkwardness from him spoke volumes. Even Aeon isn't perfect, and that is one thing I realized through all of this. But, it's not bad. It's a wonderful thing to learn about others. And...

“Aeon-san, there's something I need to give you.”

“What?”

“I found it this morning in my room.” I took out a sticker from my pocket.

“This is...”

Aeon removed his sunglasses to look at the letters. Undoubtedly, it was Sugar's graffiti. I don't know if this was instigated by George, or maybe he used someone from his gang, but the sticker was delivered to my room. And I knew that it must have been Sugar because the sticker had the same style as Aeon, with the words “*Everything comes to an end*” written on it. That's right, it's not “nothing” anymore, but a simple end. No matter how much you wish for it, you can't revert back time. All encounters will eventually come to an end.

“Sugar sure has grown,” Aeon muttered.

Sure, it may have been nothing but a random sticker...But that's also exactly why it could be a *true masterpiece*.

“Take care, Aeon-san.”

“Yeah, let's meet again, Yoshi.” Aeon stuffed the sticker in his pocket and shook my hand, then moved closer to tap me on the back.

Since the time for departure was drawing closer, I stepped onto the train.

“Sorry! It took me longer than I thought!”

Finally, I could hear her voice.

“You’re late. I thought you wouldn’t come to see me off.”

“I honestly didn’t think I’d make it in time, either,” Boudicia said as she put her hands on her knees, gasping for air. “So, y’know, make sure to text once in a while.”

“Of course.”

“And give that *fox* my regards. Tell her she can go to hell.”

“Understood, I’ll tell her.” I showed a wry smile.

No matter what she says, she must have taken a liking to Nelina.

“Aw, man.”

“What’s wrong?”

“I was just thinking that time sure flies fast.”

“That is true.”

And yet, I didn’t feel particularly lonely. Thinking back on this last year, we’ve always been together. And it was the best time in my life, but I was prepared for it to end.

“Yo...Yoshi.”

“Yes?”

“Well, you know...”

Seeing Boudicia fumble over her own words, Lara poked a bit of fun at her.

“Boo darling, if you don’t say it now, you’ll just regret it later.”

“Shut up! I know that!”

Stirred up by a grinning Lara, Boudicia screamed and sighed.

“Yoshi...Well...Gaaah, I don’t know what to say at times like these! Just...take care, okay?!”

Seeing her like that, I had to laugh out loud.

“That’s very much like you, Boo-san.”

“Stop teasing me...Also, there’s something I want to give you.” She said and took out a spray can from her backpack—with the number 94 written on it.

“This is...”

It was the beginning of everything. The spray can she threw at me... and the first time we met.

“If possible...I’d be happy if you remembered me.”

“...Thank you very much.”

I struggled to hold back the tears when Aeon spoke up with a sour face.

“...I hate to break it to you, but you can’t take spray cans with you on your flight.”

Hearing that, everyone burst out laughing.

“S-Seriously?! Why didn’t anybody tell me?!” Boudicia evidently panicked.

Thinking about it, that makes sense. They’re regarded as dangerous objects because they could explode inside the plane because of the pressure.

“I’m sorry, but I think I’ll have to return this, then,” I said and placed the can in her hand. “Boo-san.”

“Hm?”

“I actually... hesitated for the longest time if I should really go back to Japan.”

Boudicia’s eyes shot wide open.

“The days I spent here in Bristol were really fun. Even when

everything was chaotic and dangerous...And it was you who guided me into this bright world, Boo-san.”

“Yoshi, then...”

“But.” I interrupted her words. “I need to move on with my own music. If not, I can’t be with you.”

“Why?! Who cares about that!”

“I do.”

I gently grabbed her hands, as she reached for my collar.

“I don’t want to lose against the graffiti artist I respect more than anybody else in the world. I want to stand next to you...on an equal level.”

Boudicia looked at me in shock, fought hard to hold back the tears, and then smiled.

“I swear...You’re so *stubborn* when it comes to the *weirdest* things,” she said and looked at me. “...Say, I haven’t given you a response yet, right?”

Now that she mentioned it, the answer to my confession was still up in the air.

“Well, um, it’s okay. It’s how it goes in Japan.”

“Then I’ll show you how we do it in Britain,” she said and took a step inside the train.

She leaned forward to approach my face—**and then kissed me**. Her lips, pressed on mine, were firm and soft. And, they gave off a faint scent of vanilla.

“Don’t forget about me, okay?”

“I won’t. Ever.”

Seriously...If she does something like this, then there’s no chance I

could ever forget. She, who couldn't write anymore, and I, who couldn't play anymore. We both needed each other. But, that is no longer the case. She can now freely write, even without me by her side. And I can focus on my music again, without having her with me. Even if we're apart, we'll be fine. We'll continue to live inside each other. That's why...this is fine. I heard the announcer of the train, declaring that departure was imminent.

Boudicia—I looked at her back as she slowly moved away from the train. If I hadn't met her, my life would have turned out completely different. Where there are encounters, there must be partings. Once you finish writing on a wall, you move on to the next. And being alive is probably just a repeat of that. And then, her voice replayed in my mind:

'When you're writing graffiti, the spray tends to just blast off everywhere. When it's the most crucial, graffiti rarely lets you do as you please—'

That's right. If life really was like never-ending spray, then even the trails that weren't meant to be must hold some sort of meaning.

"Excuse me!"

Hearing my voice, she turned around.

"Regarding the last scene of the movie we watched the other day."

"Hm? Yeah, but is that really important right now?"

"It's now or never."

I took her hand and pulled her toward me with all my might. She lost her balance and fell forward, right into my arms. And then, the door of the train closed.





“Huh? Wait, what?! Hold on!”

Boudicia clung to the door and tried to open it. Outside of the train,

everyone was smiling at us. Even Lara's voice only barely reached us.

"Oh dear! Not bad, Yoshi! Have a nice trip!"

"Hey, wait! Open the damn door!"

Boudicia slammed her hands on the door, but it wouldn't budge. Seconds later, the train took off, and we were forced to look at each other. Her blonde hair, blue eyes, and snow-white skin were right within my reach.

"What are we gonna do now?"

"Good question."

"You didn't even consider that?!"

"I'm sorry, it just...happened in the heat of the moment. But, we can just pay for the ticket later, so it should be fine."

"I know that. How many years do you think I've been living in Britain?"

"So...Well, this will take us to London, but you can just take the train back to Bristol while I head off to Heathrow Airport...No, we could also get off at Bath, too."

"...I have it with me."

"Huh?"

At first, I didn't understand what she was referring to. But when she saw my flustered face, she repeated herself.

"I...have my passport with me."

"Why...?"

"Well, you know. Just on a whim, I guess."

Seeing her struggle to speak properly, I had to smile. I'm sure that, in her heart, she must have already decided what she wanted to do. And she just waited. Waited for me to pull her along with me. I swear...

From start to finish, she can never be honest.

“Will we get a ticket for the plane, I wonder.”

I stored away my suitcase and took my guitar with me, as we found two open seats.

“Who knows? Well, I’ll just sit on your lap if we don’t.”

“They probably won’t let you do that, so I’ll have you look after my guitar in the storage area.”

“The hell? Then you can sleep with your guitar while I relax with the other passengers.”

We looked at each other and laughed. I moved over a bit and kissed her once more.

“Well, I have no clue how things will turn out...” She said while looking outside the window. “But for now, let’s just go as far as we can, Yoshi.”

A single lifetime can’t possibly be enough to learn everything there is in this world. But even so, the Boudicia I get to know from now on... is something only I’m allowed to see. And only I can watch her go through this change. At least...for now.

The train sped up toward the east, as the scenery outside the window gradually changed. Nothing in this world remains the same forever. Surely, my life, and the time I get to spend with her, will be over in the blink of an eye. And then, just like spray leaving the can, we will grow weaker, and eventually disappear. But even so, we live in this one moment, loving something. And if it was possible to leave these feelings on a wall...then that would be its own eternity, I’m sure.

OVERWRITE: LONDON INVASION

THE END.

Advertisement

Afterword

Hello everyone. I'm Ikeda Akiya, and I wrote this volume. After volume 1 and volume 2, when it came to creating the story for volume 3, I thought of two movies. One is the very movie that Yoshi and Boudicia watched at the beginning of this volume. Impacted by this beauty and appeal of "something that isn't here," I envisioned the attack of writers from London, which forces the two to face their own feelings. I won't spoil the name of the movie here, but it definitely exists, so please look for it.

The second movie is called "Ford vs Ferrari," which is a racing and mechanic-type movie depicting the story of the British person Ken Miles. It's based on a true story of how he decides to team up with Ford in order to beat the current King Ferrari, and the trails he creates on the way. And in the movie, Ken states the following:

"If you don't challenge the utmost limit, you can't win the race. But if you surpass your limit, the car will break down. That's why you have to become able to guess just where exactly your limit is—"

And in this third volume, to fully depict the life of an artist, I created a story that doesn't stop even when the limit is being reached. I would be very delighted if you felt the speed and heat that would result from that.

Finally, I must give my thanks. First, my two editors, who have always guided me whenever I was lost or wrecked too much havoc. Then, my illustrator Mirea-san, who breathed life into the characters I created. I can't forget my designer AlcoInk-san, as well as everyone who helped in distributing this volume. Of course, my wife and daughter deserve all my life for supporting me as a new author and allowing me to live my dream. Then, there is you, who read through volumes 1, 2, and finally reached me here. I hope that this story might be able to give you a slight push on the back when you're

feeling confused, hurt, or lost on where to do and what to do.

Now then, nobody knows what the future may have in store for us. And at the same time, only Yoshi and Boudicia know where they will be heading from now on. However, whatever or wherever that may be, they will continue to overwrite themselves and witness new sights. Living their lives to the fullest, loving what they want to love.

And for us, I hope we can meet again someday, at a new wall with a new painting greeting us.

See you later, alligator!

Ikeda Akiya



Author's Comment

ブリistol生まれの偉大な芸術家は、バンクシーだけではなく。90年代に巨大なガラス水槽に入れた動物をホルマリンで保存した作品で名を馳せ、以来現代美術の一線で活躍し続けるダミアン・ハーストは、その代表格でしょう。シュガーもまた、ハーストと同じく「生」と「死」をテーマにしたアーティストです。劇中ではあえて区別していませんが、メッセージ性を前面に出した作品はストリート・アートと呼ばれ、自分の名前を主に書くグラフィティと区別されることもあります。グラフィティという枠組みは、もしかしたら彼にとっては狭すぎたのかもしれません。いつかサザビーズで彼の作品が落札されたというニュースを見たいものです。

Author's Comment

グラフィティはアートとして認められてきている一方で、多くの場合は器物損壊でもあり、実際にギャングの縄張り結びついている場合もあります。グラフィティの抗争では、死者が出ることもありました。リコリスの生きるストリートには法律とはまた異なる厳格なルールが存在し、上書きにまつわるグラフィティの不文律はその一端にすぎません。グラフィティ・クルーは志を同じくする創作集団でもありますが、こうした複雑な関係を調整するためのものという側面もあります。なにかあったらその地域のクルーを通じて話をつける、というわけです。おそらくはどのクルーとも繋がりのないあなたが、プリストルでうっかり彼女に出会わないことを願うばかりです。



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